

**A little boy's new baby brother was screaming up a storm.
 "Where'd we get him?" he asked his mom.
 "He came from heaven," his mother replied
 "Whoa!" said the little boy. "I can see why they threw him out!"**

- During Jesus' brief earthly life, He grew up in a home that was probably as normal as any other Palestinian family
 - His earthly father was a tradesman, working with stone for constructing buildings, which was the carpentry of that day
 - Jesus was the son of Mary but His Father was not earthly
 - He was conceived by the Holy Spirit as a new Adam, not made of the same flesh as the first Adam
 - But Joseph and Mary had other children that were conceived in the natural way
 - One was a man named Jude, who wrote the NT letter by the same name
 - Another half brother of Jesus was a man named Jacob
 - Taking the Hebrew name Jacob and translating it first into Greek and later into Latin and eventually English, we arrive at the name James
 - Both Jude and James grew up with their older half-brother Jesus, living and working in Nazareth
 - We know nothing about their early years together, but knowing that Jesus was the Spiritual Light and they were born into spiritual darkness, we might assume there was some friction
 - Yet we can also assume there was sibling love and affection
- Around AD 26, Jesus begins His earthly ministry and begins teaching in the Galilee that He was the Messiah
 - His very first declaration was made in His home town of Nazareth in the synagogue
 - And as Jewish men in Nazareth, it's likely that Jesus' half brothers were present when they heard Him declare that He fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy of a coming Savior
 - We can just imagine how that declaration must have struck Jesus' brothers
 - In fact, we don't have to imagine, because Scripture tells us clearly how Jesus' brothers viewed His ministry
 - In John 7 we see His brothers showing nothing but contempt for Jesus' claims

John 7:2 Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Booths, was near.

John 7:3 Therefore His brothers said to Him, "Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing.

John 7:4 "For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world."

John 7:5 For not even His brothers were believing in Him.

- Jesus' brothers advised Jesus to go to Jerusalem to declare Himself to be Messiah
 - Because they saw their brother engaged in an impossible task: that of convincing the world He was the Messiah by preaching to among the obscure towns of the Galilee
 - But they knew better
 - They encouraged Him to go to Jerusalem so He might be accepted
 - Because they didn't believe His claims, and thought it was just a political campaign
- After Jesus' death and resurrection, He appeared to James according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:7, and by His appearing, Jesus brought His brother to faith
 - After that moment, James became a faithful apostle and leader in the church living in Jerusalem
 - He never again described himself as a (half) brother to the Lord
 - Forgoing his claim to any fleshly relationship with Jesus, he instead identified himself by his spiritual association: as a bond servant of God and Christ

James 1:1 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.

- You notice James also identifies his audience for this letter: those of the twelve tribes who are living dispersed abroad
 - Let's talk about this audience for a moment
- The letter of James is likely the earliest written scripture of the New Testament
 - It was written perhaps as early as AD 45, barely 12 years after Jesus' crucifixion
 - It was written before Paul began his missionary journeys or wrote his letters
 - It was written before any of the gospel accounts had been recorded
 - It was written before the temple was destroyed
 - And it was written at a time when the church was largely comprised of Jewish believers living in the land of Israel
 - With a small number of Jewish believers living in surrounding regions of Asia Minor and as far away as Rome
 - We classify James as one of the Jewish epistles in the New Testament
 - It was written from Jerusalem to the Jewish believers who had been dispersed outside the Land, meaning outside Palestine
 - Altogether, there are five Jewish epistles in the NT: James, Hebrews, Jude and 1 & 2 Peter
 - The five Jewish letters share common themes, in keeping with their common

audience

- Two of the Jewish epistles – Jude and 2 Peter – were written to contend with false teaching among Jewish believers, particularly the Judaizers
- The other three – Hebrews, James and 1 Peter – taught believers how to withstand the persecution that came upon Jews when they proclaimed the name of Christ
 - A Jew who confessed Christ was particularly susceptible to persecution, since their confession usually resulted in them being ostracized from their Jewish family and friends
 - James himself was eventually stoned to death in Jerusalem for violating the Law on orders of the Jewish high priest
- All five Jewish epistles are intensely practical sermons on Christian living
 - They focus on how to live as a believer, especially to Jewish believers who have come out of a life based on Jewish traditions and Law
 - They don't offer much Christian doctrine or theology
 - They speak to the consequences of faith, not to the origin or content of faith
 - James in particular is intensely focused on a believer's behavior rather than on his belief or knowledge
 - It is a book concerned with sanctification rather than salvation
- As we dive into the content of James' letter, we see the first theme is summarized in vs.2-4

James 1:2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,

- The first theme of James' letter is proper Christian attitude and persistence when experiencing trials
 - The Greek language used in v.2 is especially important to understanding James' first purpose in writing
 - First, look at the end of the verse...encountering various trials
 - The word encounter is *peripipto*, which means to fall into something
 - It doesn't mean to yield to something, as in to fall into sin
 - Rather, it means to come upon something
 - The same word is used in Luke 10 in the parable of the Good Samaritan

Luke 10:30 Jesus replied and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers...

- Then the phrase “various trials” is an interesting choice of words

- You'll see many different interpretations of this phrase
 - Literally it means many colored temptations or varied experiments or tests
 - The sense is of circumstances that take many forms and are brought about for a divine purpose, as a test or experiment
- By trials, is James talking about Christians being persecuted, hated, receiving unfair treatment due to their faith?
 - Yes, as many Jews were experiencing these things in James' day
- But is James also talking about ordinary difficulties like illnesses? Financial difficulties? Relationship struggles? Unemployment? Addictions? Phobias?
 - Yes. All colors of trials and temptations, James says
 - He's talking about the myriad of life circumstances that come upon a believer
 - Problems we face, urges we must resist, desires we must control
 - But now because of our faith, we are called to respond differently to these circumstances
- When James uses words like "come upon us" and "experiment" or "test," he's not just describing the quality of these trials
 - He's also indicating their origin, of Who brings these trials
 - They originate with God
 - He brings them upon us; they don't happen as a matter of chance
 - They are a consequence of His Sovereign purpose to test us
 - Charles Spurgeon put it this way:

I believe that every particle of dust that dances in the sunbeam does not move an atom more or less than God wishes – that every particle of spray that dashes against the steamboat has its orbit, as well as the sun in the heavens – that the chaff from the hand of the winnower is steered as the stars in their courses. The creeping of an aphid over the rosebud is as much fixed as the march of the devastating pestilence – the fall of . . . leaves from a poplar is as fully ordained as the tumbling of an avalanche.

- It's this understanding that God guides our circumstances and brings these trials upon us that enables us to understand and obey James' command at the outset of this verse
 - James commands us to consider or count these circumstances as all joy
 - Consider or count means to make up your mind concerning something or to judge something
 - Our attitude is a product of our will, of our judgments and knowledge
 - We have a choice in how we view our circumstances, especially those that come upon us because of our walk of faith

- And the choice we should make is to count trials as joy
 - In Greek the word joy is *chara*, which means supreme joy, the highest joy
 - While we could face trials with fear or anger or sorrow, as Christians we are to choose to be joyful
- And we come to this attitude not naturally but rather as a result of our specific knowledge
 - First, from v.2 we can know that our circumstances were ordained by the Lord Himself as a divine test
 - An experiment to see how we will respond, what we will do and how we are maturing in our walk as Christians
 - As Spurgeon says, everything we experience in life comes about according to God's will
 - And God brings these trials about so that we may pass the test
- In high school, I had an English professor who loved surprise tests
 - In fact, there were no scheduled exams in his courses
 - He would give all tests at unannounced times
 - When he announced his surprise test, it was always a trial
 - But when I was prepared for the test, I approached the moment very differently than when I was caught off guard
 - When I was prepared, I knew I would pass the test and receive a good grade
 - And so I could see the trial as joy, simply because I had the knowledge and preparation to meet the test and come out the other side with a good result
 - On the other hand, if my knowledge was lacking, I would respond to the trial with worry and despair and usually receive a poor grade
- James says our approach to the trials of life work according to a similar principle
 - The more we understand about how God uses trials in our life to test us and to assign an eternal grade, the better prepared we will be to face them properly

James 1:3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

James 1:4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- James says knowing is the key
 - The Greek word is *ginosko*, which means to understand, to perceive properly
 - To see things in the right way
 - Are we seeing our trials in our life the right way?
- You remember the story I told of how my car was stolen from my garage a few years ago
 - As I watched the thief drive away, I remember thinking what was God trying to

prepare me for through this experience

- I could have been angry or despondent
- But I knew God was in control, and He had allowed this person to take my car
- And I knew that my faith was most on display under these circumstances
- The knowledge that this event was under God's control changed my perception of the event and allowed me to react differently, even joyfully
 - Why was I joyful? Because I realized I was passing the test
 - The enemy had taken his best shot at me, and God allowed it and I wasn't letting my flesh drive my response
 - And I could be joyful because I knew that God was prepared to reward me in far greater ways, eternal ways, than the value of any car
- Jesus tell us exactly the same thing regarding the tests and trials we face in faith

Matt. 5:11 “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

Matt. 5:12 “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

- We are receiving tests for the sake of Heavenly reward
 - Have you ever considered that each time you suffer through a trial, there's something eternal at stake?
 - A grade from the Lord is being assigned us each time we come through one of those trials
 - And when we face trials successfully, we learn endurance
 - The word in Greek is *hupomone*, which means patience, steadfastness
 - James is talking about a consistency in our Christian character and attitude that doesn't vary with the circumstances
 - We aren't on cloud 9 one day, and down in the dumps the next day
 - If that describes us, then it's a sign according to Scripture that we still have a lot of maturing left to do in our Christian walk
 - Or perhaps it means we haven't been passing our God-appointed tests
 - And if we aren't, then it's probably a consequence of a lack of knowledge
 - Of not recognizing that God brings us these circumstances
 - Or that our response is being graded for eternal purposes
- As James says in v.4, our endurance through trials (i.e., our consistent patient attitude and response to each difficulty) will have a perfect result
 - But the word for perfect means something else in Greek

- The word is *telelos*, which means complete or mature
- James says that endurance leads to the result of complete maturity, perfection in that sense
 - Brothers and sisters, do you desire to reach the point of spiritual maturity?
 - Do you yearn to reflect Christ in your life and become that good and faithful servant that pleases his or her Master?
 - Then James says the road that takes us to maturity is filled with trials and tests
 - And as each test comes, we count it joy because we know we are learning patience and endurance, which brings maturity
- As James says, you will lack nothing in the area of spiritual maturity
 - You will be greatly blessed as a result of your close walk with the Spirit
 - On the other hand, what do you think the Lord will do with a Christian who is lacking spiritual maturity?
 - The logical conclusion is He will bring trials, just as He did for the Jewish Christians in James' day
 - And just like my English professor, when we face a trial unsuccessfully, God's likely to bring another soon to give us another opportunity to do better
 - Have you ever faced your life's trials with that thought? That these trials are coming from God like quizzes in a class, and you're supposed to excel not despair
 - But the key to meeting the test successfully is in our wisdom and knowledge

James 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

- James acknowledges that often the believer lacks the wisdom to face trials successfully
 - Just as when I lacked wisdom to pass those surprise English tests, we risk failing the tests God brings us for lack of godly wisdom
 - But James tells us that our Father in Heaven is ready and willing to provide us with the needed wisdom to pass His tests if we only ask
 - And He will answer our requests for wisdom in the face of trials without reproach
 - The Greek being *oneidizo* which means casting an insult
 - There's an important difference between my high school English instructor and our Father in Heaven
 - If I had stopped in the middle of one of those surprise English tests to ask my instructor for the knowledge I lacked, I can tell you what I would have learned

- I would have learned not to ever do that again
- Because my request would have been met with a reproach
- Consider all that James is saying concerning trials
 - Our Father wants His children to grow in spiritual maturity
 - Because our degree of spiritual maturity in this life will be the Lord's measuring stick for assigning us honor and reward in the Kingdom
 - And our Father desires that we please Him and bring Him glory so that He may reward us
 - So James says that trials and tests and experiments will come upon us, by God's Hand
 - And He brings us these trials not to harm us but to develop within us endurance and patience and persistence
 - Which over time give opportunity for us to develop spiritual maturity
 - And with that maturity, we can serve Him in steadfastness and faithfulness
 - But then incredibly, James says these tests are open book tests
 - God is willing to give us the answers, the wisdom we need to pass His tests with flying colors
 - Did you notice James says that when we recognize we lack the knowledge to face our trials in a godly and mature manner, we are to ask God...
 - Not Oprah
 - Not the Christian counselors or the latest Christian bestseller
 - Not horoscopes
 - Not even our family and friends
 - James says we should ask God, meaning petitioning Him in prayer and seeking Him in His word
 - And James says the Lord will answer our request
 - Always
 - The Lord is willing to give us the godly wisdom we need to pass His tests, because the whole point of taking a test is to pass
 - Our teachers didn't give us tests to cause us to fail...well, most teachers
 - Tests were opportunities for us to succeed and grow
 - And when we failed, it was only because we lacked knowledge
 - James was writing to Jewish believers who were facing many trials, many difficulties
 - And in the decades to come the persecution only grew worse, much worse
 - How will they respond to those trials? Will they give a good testimony and please their Father?
 - Only if they have prepared, and practiced and endured earlier trials

- And counted it all joy when the Lord brought each test knowing it was evidence that the Lord was working in their lives to mature them for an eternal purpose
- Remember, our final exam isn't even found in this life
 - It comes at the Judgment Seat when the Lord will judge the works of believers
 - And we should all want to be ready for that day, to be counted perfect and complete

- The book of James is probably the most misunderstood letter in the New Testament
 - Martin Luther tried to eliminate the letter from the canon of Scripture because he misunderstood James' intent in writing on matters of faith
 - Luther presumed that James was teaching that works were combined with faith to yield our salvation
 - He even placed the letter in the appendix of the Bible he translated into German
 - James does not teach that works and faith must be combined for salvation
 - Instead, James presents the importance of faith at work in a Christian's life
 - Consider James' principle audience again
 - His audience were largely Jews
 - Jewish men and women who prior to a faith in the Gospel were raised up under a rigorous set of rules and restrictions defined in the Mosaic Law
 - Life under the Law is terribly difficult
 - And this harsh life of following rules and limitations was instituted by God for the Jewish nation to achieve two outcomes
 - First, it set them apart from the world
 - They were a peculiar people, with unique customs, and completely separated from the rest of the world
 - It preserved a line to the Messiah and gave rise to the prophets and God's word
 - The Law was comprehensive and restrictive because through all those regulations, the uniqueness and separation of the Jewish people was assured
 - Secondly, the Law was a tutor or schoolmaster over the nation
 - It regulated sin and promoted morality
 - It illustrated how sin requires a payment of blood
 - It revealed the holiness of God
 - Ultimately, it frustrated the Jew who believed he could be righteous by his own work, and it drove him to look for another solution...to a Messiah
 - But by James' day, Jewish Christians were coming to understand that by faith in the Messiah they had met the requirements of the Law
 - And so they were no longer under Law
 - They were now under grace and able to live without the rules and restrictions of the Mosaic Law
 - It's a liberating experience, but it also brought dangers and bad habits
 - These bad habits and bad assumptions are James' principle concerns as he writes this letter

- And this fact explains why James is so often seen connecting faith with imperatives for action or response
- We see him do that for the first time today as we return to Chapter 1, in verse 5

James 1:5 **But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.**

James 1:6 **But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.**

James 1:7 **For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord,**

James 1:8 **being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.**

- Remember from last week, we learned that the wisdom James is speaking of here is the knowledge we need to face a trial
 - James isn't speaking about wisdom for every circumstance
 - Not every request for knowledge will gain an answer...

Like when Satan once asked God to give him an answer for Satan's poor reputation. He said to God, "You made a world that wasn't fair. You made it so that most people have to struggle every day, fighting against their natural desires, dealing with all kinds of losses, grief, disasters, and catastrophes. Yet people must still worship and adore you. But when people fight, get in trouble, and cheat each other, I always get blamed, even when it is not my fault. Sure, I'm evil, but can't you do something to help me spread the blame around a little?"

And so God created lawyers.

- But for the rest of us, the promise James gives us is that God will answer our calls for wisdom when facing trials in life
 - What a wonderful promise that is...that we will receive the answers to God's tests
- But then James puts a stipulation on how we ask for that knowledge
 - We must ask in faith
 - Here's the first connection James proposes between faith and action
 - When we act to seek God's wisdom, we must act in accordance with faith
- Let's examine what James is saying here
 - In the text I read, the NASB translation is unfortunate in the way it renders the Greek word *diakrinomenos* (doubting)

- The word literally means to discern or judge between, but when taken with James' example of a surf, it conveys an entirely different sense
 - He's not talking about someone who doubts but a man who has a divided motive or inconsistent approach to facing trials
- The King James Bibles gets it right

James 1:6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

- There you see the connection between vacillating and the movement of the sea's surf, in and out, never stable
 - James goes on to describe this person as someone driven and tossed by the wind
- So what kind of person is James talking about?
 - First, the person is unstable and wavers
 - In the context of what James teaches, we're talking about someone who is wavering and unstable in where they seek their understanding of their circumstances
 - In the midst of trials, the believer who calls out to God for wisdom must remain stable in his reliance on God
 - That reliance begins with a recognition that God is the One producing the test, the trial
 - And secondly, the reliance continues in seeking godly wisdom to face the circumstances, rather than growing impatient and running to a worldly solution
 - That's the instability that James says results in God withholding the wisdom we desire to face the trials
- Let me give you a story to illustrate what James is talking about
 - A Christian man is experiencing a trial in his life
 - He's the father of a teenage son, and the son has entered a rebellious period
 - The son is running in the wrong crowd, is struggling at school and showing disrespect for his dad
 - The father is a relatively young Christian, so he's not very mature in his Christian walk, and he feels unprepared to face this trial properly
 - One day the son has a run in with the police, and he has a court date with the possibility of receiving months of community service and probation
 - The father wonders how to deal with his son's situation
 - Someone tells him to ask God for the wisdom to face the trial
 - The man prays and reads God's word, and the father senses God telling him to let his son face the decision of the court, but he's not sure that's the right course

- While he's wondering, the father runs into a friend who says he knows the judge and can get the matter settled quietly on the side and save his son from any penalty
 - The father wavers unsure what to do
 - He goes back to prayer again and asks God to give him direction
- The father hears nothing and decides to take his friend up on the offer
- The judge dismisses the charges and the son escapes the penalty
 - What do you think happened to the son later?
- More importantly, why didn't the father in this story hear from God when he asked about which option to accept?
 - Because he wavered
 - As James explains, when we approach God for the wisdom to face a trial, we must approach the throne boldly but also with faith
 - Faith to accept that the wisdom we receive from God is the right answer
 - The father was instructed by God to let the son receive his due penalty
 - Because only by suffering the consequences of his actions could the son be rescued from his destructive pattern
 - But the father wavered, and wavering means going back and forth between godly answers and worldly answers
 - He was an unstable man, as James calls him
 - In all his ways...this is a characteristic of his personality or spiritual immaturity
 - And his is double-minded, which means doubled-souled
 - I think of Lot as such a person
 - But the reverse is also true
 - When we grow in our maturity and reliance on God's direction, from both study of His word and from prayer life
 - We become a more stable person with respect to spiritual maturity
 - We are equipped to face trials big and small in ways that let us roll with the punches
 - All the while accepting and often understanding God's purposes through it all
 - But it's a mark of spiritual immaturity when we won't patiently wait on the Lord and then accept His answers when we receive them
 - Rather than seek better answers elsewhere or simply follow our own opinions
 - For that person, there will always be a temptation to receive the world's answers, because the world is always ready with answers to our questions
 - There's Dr. Phil, Redbook, Cosmo, our neighbors, our family, our horoscope,

etc.

- Even Christian friends and books offer advice, some of it sound even
- But none are a replacement for God's own voice and His own word
- So, if you want God to give you wisdom to face trials, learn stability
- Rest in Him, and don't go seeking a hundred answers rather than accepting His alone
- James then moves to a third principle of facing trials...our position in the world

James 1:9 But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position;

James 1:10 and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away.

James 1:11 For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

- Have you ever thought of wealth or status as a form of trial or test in itself?
 - It certainly is, and it doesn't matter which end of the financial spectrum we find ourselves
 - God has placed us where we are in terms of our financial position as another kind of test to develop our spiritual maturity
 - James addresses both ends here as he continues to teach on how a Christian lives through adversity
 - First to the brother of humble circumstances, it's an inward test
 - When we say humble or poor, we're talking about someone who lives on the low end of whatever spectrum exists within a given community
 - That person will be faced with an inward test of how to understand those circumstances and maintain the proper attitude through them
 - What is the right way to face this trial?
 - How do we show spiritual maturity as we contend with needs we can't meet in this life?
 - How does that person show Christ?
 - If you listen to the smiley-faced prosperity teachers of our day, the answer is to seek for that wealth "in faith" and demand God provide it
 - But what does James teach? Essentially, the opposite
 - James says take your satisfaction, and "glory in" spiritual riches you will have in the kingdom which you earn with your spiritual maturity
 - Set your mind on things above, not on the things of earth, as Paul says in Colossians 3:2

- Then to the brother who finds himself with wealth, the test is similar but it's an outward test
 - Don't glory or celebrate your earthly wealth
 - Find your satisfaction in remaining humble before the Lord
 - Like David said:

**Psa. 51:3 For I know my transgressions,
And my sin is ever before me.**

- Our humility should be our chief concern...being “proud” of our humility
- And riches and humility are usually in opposition
 - Money is a means to independence, to living as if there is no God
 - We can follow our flesh and pride as far as our money will take us
- And so when God grants someone wealth, it's a serious test of spiritual maturity
 - Will we forgo the independence that wealth offers us and rely on the Lord despite our wealth?
- How often do you think Christians pass these tests?
 - First, consider how long this test lasts
 - It's the test that never ends
 - It seems that our perspective of money is a chief tool the Lord uses to develop our spiritual maturity
 - So we are to live with eyes for eternity knowing that nothing in this world lasts into eternity except our degree of spiritual maturity
 - In v.11 James compares the world's wealth to the beauty of flowering grass, which in a desert climate like Palestine didn't last very long
 - Think about Job and how quickly his wealth vanished...or others today
 - So be careful what you wish for when you seek riches
 - You're asking for a seriously difficult test of spiritual maturity, and it will be one that many people fail
 - From the trials of wealth, James moves forward to his next lesson on trials

James 1:12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

- Now James turns his teaching to what the future holds for the man (or woman) who faces trials and tests successfully
 - Firstly, the person who endures or perseveres through trials has the potential to

- experience a blessed life
 - Blessed simply means a spiritually happy and content life
 - Think about that for a moment
 - Enduring trials and stressful tests that God brings us will result in a peaceful and contented life
 - Because through those experiences and the resulting spiritual maturity, we gain the ability through Christ in us to see these circumstances entirely differently
 - And the blessing is the contentedness that comes from having eyes for eternity
- Secondly, once that person is approved...they receive a reward
 - The word approved is *dokimos*, which is the word for tested
 - Once they have passed the test, in other words
 - Then they are worthy to receive the crown of life
 - This is a crown the Lord has promised to those Who love Him
 - The word for crown is *stephanos*, which was the wreath awarded to the olympians who won a race
 - It reflects an award that we can earn through performance
 - Therefore, we understand it's not a symbol for salvation
 - Never does Scripture refer to our salvation as a wreath or crown that we can earn, for it is by grace alone
 - This is one of five crowns or wreaths mentioned in the New Testament for believers who excel in serving the Lord through trials
 - Crowns are measures of our faithful service and they will play some role in defining our authority in the coming Kingdom
 - And these awards are presented when the test is over, at the Judgment Seat of Christ that all believers will face
- This is the crown for anyone who perseveres through to the end of a trial brought upon them to test their love for Christ
 - Remember, we're not talking about a test of whether we believe in the gospel or whether we are saved
 - We're talking about a test of spiritual maturity that demonstrates or proves our love for Christ
 - And the purpose of the testing is to develop us and create a witness for Christ that brings Him glory in the world
- Jesus asks for a similar commitment from the early church in Smyrna
 - In that city, there was a particularly strong persecution against the Jewish Christians by unbelieving Jews in the local synagogue
 - They endured exactly the sort of trial and test that James is speaking about

here

- In fact James' words were prophetic in the way they foretold what the Jewish Christians would face
 - Jesus says it this way to that church in Revelation

Rev. 2:8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:

Rev. 2:9 ‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Rev. 2:10 ‘Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

- Jesus describes Himself as the the One Who was dead and is now alive to a church that was soon to experience martyrdom
 - He wants to encourage their faithful witness even in the face of death
 - That's quite a trial and test, isn't it
 - But remember what James says about the reward
 - Only after we have passed the test will we expect to receive a reward
 - Failing the test doesn't get us the reward
 - But to the one who is approved, the crown of life is held out as a reward for those who endure trials
 - Did you notice that Jesus also called it a “test” in v.10?
 - Our walk with Jesus is a walk by faith, but it is also a walk of faithfulness
 - And the tests God brings us are intended to give us opportunity to prove that faithfulness and our spiritual maturity
 - And then He is prepared to reward us at the appropriate time

- Chapter 1 of James moves forward into the fourth point on facing trials
 - The letter of James never fails to strike a chord with Bible students
 - I've received a lot of mail already on the book of James, and it seems the Holy Spirit is active in provoking fresh thinking and plenty of conviction to spread around
 - He speaks in such clear and powerful terms on issues we each know so well
 - Trials, doubts, temptations, lust, inaction, favoritism
 - There's something for everyone here, isn't there?
 - In fact, on average, there is 1 imperative statement for every 2 verses in the book
- Today as we pick back up in Chapter 1, James is moving away from his third point on trials: the way to remain steadfast in facing external trials
 - And into his fourth point: how to face inward trials, which he calls temptations
 - And we can all identify with today's teaching, since we all have our own ways of suffering temptation

A man walked into the kitchen one day not too long ago to find his wife stalking around with a fly swatter.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Hunting Flies" she replied.

"Oh... Killing any?" he asked, after pausing to watch her make several rounds around the kitchen table.

"Yep, 3 males and 2 females", she replied.

"How can you tell?" he asked, quite intrigued.

"3 were on the refrigerator and 2 were on the phone."

- Let's consider James' words beginning in vs.13-15

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

James 1:14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

James 1:15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

- Up to this point, James had been focused on how a man or woman of faith should address trials or tests
 - And James attributed the source of these trials to the Lord, in the sense that we know He is in control of our life circumstances
 - And He brings tests as a way to reveal or expose our degree of spiritual maturity

- So as we are taught of the Lord by His Spirit living and working in us...
- Similarly, we are tested by the Lord at times to help us show that work to ourselves and others, so that God may be glorified
 - A glory that is revealed when Christ's work is revealed in us

Gal. 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

- But at this point in the letter James needs to make an important distinction between these external tests brought by God for our benefit
 - And inward tests or temptations that are not the result of God's design
 - They are natural products of our sinful nature
 - Yet they are still a reality, and we must face them
 - And like external tests, we face them best when we understand them with godly wisdom and respond to them according to that wisdom
- In v.13, James begins with the simple conditional statement, let no one say when he is tempted...
 - James doesn't say “if” he is tempted
 - By using “when”, James emphasizes the simple reality of temptations
 - They are a universal experience...we all have temptations
 - This isn't some academic discussion, or a theoretical possibility
 - This is a certainty...we all face temptations
 - And the way we respond to them has eternal consequences, just like any test or trial
 - Now when we experience temptations, we could be confused about their source
 - Earlier James taught that trials are tests brought by God, so now we might think incorrectly that temptations to sin are also God-ordained tests as well
 - So James corrects us in v.13...when we face a temptation, we cannot say God is placing this temptation before us as a test
 - Temptations do not originate with God
 - And James gives us an important principle or pattern to understand why we can know this
 - First, God Himself is not tempted by evil
 - The Greek word is *apeiratos*, which is un-temptable
 - Another way to say it is God has no experience with evil, no relationship with it
 - Evil is a foreign, unknown thing to God

- When he says God is not tempted by evil, James means in the sense of succumbing to it
 - God does not give in to evil and participate in it
- This is an important distinction because we know Hebrews teaches that Jesus was tempted, and we need to appreciate the distinction

Heb. 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

- In James, the issue is whether God has ever come to know and experience evil by succumbing to temptation...He hasn't
 - In Hebrews, the issue is whether God in Christ had opportunity to give in to temptations...He did, but He never took the opportunity
 - So our God is not tempted by evil, and therefore He doesn't tempt us
- God is never in the business of tempting us to sin
 - You may wonder about the prayer Jesus taught His disciples, when it says Father, lead us not into temptation
 - When we studied this in Luke, we learned that the phrase in Greek is a figure of speech, a *litotes*
 - It means expressing a positive idea by negating the contrary
 - The proper way to translate it into English would be, Father help us stay away from temptation
- God doesn't tempt because He's not experienced in sin, which leads us to an important principle
 - We must have experienced something for ourselves before we share it with others
 - And when it comes to sin, we will share what we know
 - Sin moves from person to person, flesh to flesh
 - After woman was deceived by Satan and disobeyed God in the Garden, what was the very next thing she chose to do?
 - She shared her sin with her husband
 - Having been tempted by sin, she now became a source of temptation for another
 - If we give in to evil temptations, making it a part of who we are, we may become an instrument for the enemy to pass it on to others
 - If we are prone to deception, we may give rise to deception in others
 - If we gossip, others may follow
 - If we judge others, others will judge us

- If we are undisciplined, unrestrained, uncontrolled, we become the seed for similar behavior in others
- But if we refrain from giving in to temptations, by the Spirit's power working in us, we move away from that familiarity and become less likely to share it
- So since God isn't the source of our temptations, where do these internal tests, these temptations to sin come from?
 - In v.14 James says they come from our own lust
 - And in fact, James lines out a sequence or process by which temptations take hold and cause us to sin
 - The process has three steps, and James uses the analogy of childbirth to explain the process
 - First, the starting point is a lust that draws us away and entices us
 - According to Thomas Constable, lust is the desire to do or have or be something apart from the will of God
 - It takes many forms
 - We often use the word lust too narrowly, as in a sexual context or in describing appetites of the flesh
 - But James is speaking of it very broadly...all manner of desires outside God's will
 - These desires draw us away and entice us
 - The words in Greek mean to lure with bait
 - The bait is something outside ourselves
 - But something inside us is attracted to that bait, even though God's will is not met by that attraction
 - But when you think about it, when we use bait to fish, we are lying to the fish
 - The fish thinks the bait is something good, a morsel of food that will strengthen the fish and make it grow
 - But in reality, the bait is a danger to the fish despite the fact that it looks attractive
 - James' message is the same here
 - Our lust is drawn by the attractiveness of some kind of bait, but in the end the attraction is built on a lie
 - The lie is part of what makes our drawing away turn to sin
 - Because we are choosing to accept the lie rather than God's wisdom and truth...His will for us
 - So, step one of the temptation process is giving in to a lust for something that appears desirable, but in fact is dangerous and unhealthy
 - To use the childbirth analogy, we could say that giving in to lustful desires is like becoming pregnant

- It begins a process that has an inevitable conclusion
- But the effects of that process aren't necessarily visible for a while
- But over time the effect grows and becomes more visible
- As we give into our lusts and enjoy the bait, it may seem good for a while...but the seed of sin is just growing
- Secondly, after lust has conceived, James says in v.15 that it will give birth to sin
 - Interestingly, James is teaching that the true sin of our lives is found in our response to lust, not in the temptation itself
 - I can be tempted to lustful thoughts as I look at a woman
 - But I don't sin until I give in to that desire and entertain those thoughts
 - Then I have been carried away by a desire and it has conceived sin in me
 - I had a choice to rely on the Spirit and turn away from the desire and the temptation
 - But if I take the bait, I enter into sin
 - James compares this moment to the birth process
 - Giving in to lustful desires conceives the birth of sin
- Finally, when sin is accomplished (birthed), it brings forth death
 - Once sin is born, it takes on its own life and development, like a child
 - But just like human life has death waiting at the end of its course
 - Likewise, a course of sin brings an end of death
- What is the death James is talking about?
 - First we must continually remember this is a letter of exhortation written to believers about godly living
 - It's a letter of sanctification, not of salvation
 - So the "death" must be a statement of consequence for the believer
 - It can't be speaking about the eternal death that comes upon an unbeliever...that's simply not the context of James' point in this chapter
 - So what kinds of "death" are possible outcomes for the believer who gives into lust and pursues a course of sin?
 - One obvious answer is physical death
 - It's a Biblical principle that when God's people choose a life of sin over one of obedience, they are testing God's patience
 - And in some cases, God will visit physical death upon believers who continue in a life of disobedience
 - Consider the words of the writer of Hebrews

Heb. 10:28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the

testimony of two or three witnesses.

Heb. 10:29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

Heb. 10:30 For we know Him who said, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY.” And again, “THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.”

- The writer admonishes those who might continue to follow the Jewish system of sacrifice after having come to know Christ as the One True Sacrifice
 - If God was willing to punish His people for their failings under the Old Covenant, how much more will He act against those under the New?
- Look at the final statement in v.30: the Lord will judge His people
 - We’re talking about a consequence for the believer that begins with premature physical death brought by God as a consequence for willful sin
- The second way in which a believer may suffer death is in the sense of how James used “life” earlier in v.12
 - In the earlier verse, James offered as a reward for successfully facing trials the “crown of life”
 - I believe his use of the word death here is an intentional contrast to the life of that crown
 - Remember, the crown isn’t a reward for salvation, but for persevering through trials
 - So if we fail the test of inward trials, of temptations, that sin will conceive a “death” in us in the sense that it risks us losing the crown of life, our reward
- Consider Paul’s words when speaking about the consequences for a member of the Corinthian church who was giving in to lust and willfully sinning
 - In this case, the brother was engaged in a sexual relationship with his father’s wife
 - So to that person, Paul used his apostolic authority to bring the following consequence according to God’s will:

1Cor. 5:3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.

1Cor. 5:4 In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus,

1Cor. 5:5 I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

- As Paul says, we know this believer’s place in heaven was secure, because it was gained by faith and not works
 - Good works don’t earn our salvation, and similarly evil works (i.e., sin) can’t forfeit

- our salvation
 - But Paul says this man must suffer the destruction of his flesh (likely some kind of untimely death), for the protection of the church and the saving of his spirit
- I think of it like a football team, where the team is the Body of Christ
 - We are all in the game of life playing a part for Christ, Who is leading us and training us and calling the plays and evaluating our performances
 - And the team is striving to move in a common direction under the Lord's direction
 - And our role is just to listen to the coach and do as He directs
 - But if someone on the team is stubbornly refusing to follow the Lord's direction, that player begins to hurt the team
 - And eventually, the Lord has no choice but to bench that player
 - They are always a member of the team, but they may be taken out of the game to ensure the success of the team
 - And to prevent the individual from doing any more harm to himself and others around him
- I think that's Paul's purpose in the words he wrote to the Corinthian church
 - And I think that's James' emphasis as well when he warns us that when sin is accomplished (*apoteleo* = brought to an end), it leads to a death of sorts
- Now James offers encouragement and a path away from this course of sin and death

James 1:16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

James 1:17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

James 1:18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

- James transitions with do not be deceived
 - Don't take the bait, the deception that our lusts lead to good things and can't hurt us...
 - That's a lie
 - Don't accept that lie, but know the truth
- The good things of life can't be found in this world
 - The world is full of bait, but the good gifts are from above
- James says every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above
 - The English just doesn't do this phrase justice
 - In Greek, the words for given and gift are different

- The first emphasizes the process of delivering good things
- The second emphasizes the result, a gift received
- So a better way to say this in English might be, “The giving of good things always originates in Heaven, and the good things you receive have all come from Heaven.”
- Simply put, anything that is truly good is of God and must originate with Him and be given by Him
 - Nothing outside God’s will and purpose is considered good
 - So, don’t be deceived by things that don’t come from God
 - Look to God for what is good in your life
 - Have eyes for eternity and set your mind on things above
- James refers to God as the Father of lights, a term found nowhere else in the Bible, but present in other Jewish writings like the Dead Sea Scrolls
 - Lights is a reference to the heavenly bodies
 - So James is reminding us that God created everything in the universe, especially the Light that represents His goodness
 - And there is no variation in His nature, such that He could never shift from being light to being shadow (i.e., darkness)

1John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.

- We can trust God to be our source of good and know that if something is evil or tempting us to sin, it isn’t of God
- As we conclude, let’s review what James has taught this morning
 - James clarified that the source of our inward trials, our temptations to sin is not God Himself but our own lusts
 - So the wisdom we need to face this inward trial successfully is first to recognize its course: our flesh is a source of evil
 - Secondly, we must understand that God is a source for the good and perfect (i.e., complete) works that we seek to do instead of succumbing to temptations
 - Praying for the wisdom to face temptations will be answered, as James said earlier, with good gifts to overcome these trials
 - Gifts in the form of the mind and attitude of Christ Who dwells in us
 - But our active participation in this process is an imperative James places upon the believer
- Then finally in v.18 James proves God’s willingness to step into our sinful lives and transform us into a new person
 - James says it was the exercise of God’s will that brought us forth

- The term brought forth in Greek is a polite way of saying childbirth
 - James is describing our new birth, the way we were born again
 - It happened as a result of God's will
 - He purposed our rebirth and brought it about
 - And it happened as a product of the word of truth (the Gospel or the word of God more generally)
- So that we are the first fruits of His plan to eventually rebirth all creation into a new Heavens and Earth
 - Consider what that means
 - If God stepped into our sinful lives and brought us to an awareness of Him even before we knew Him, then doesn't that say something about God's intent?
 - Paul says in Philippians:

Phil. 1:6 For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

- James' encouragement to us is to trust that if God started something in us, then He must be prepared to continue that work
 - We can take hope and encouragement by that, and seek His wisdom and intervention in times of temptations trusting He will answer those prayers to bring us out of that moment
- But our willful response to Him is a part of the process as well
 - Which is why in Romans 8:30 Paul leaves sanctification out of his progressive list of milestones in a believer's life
 - We were all chosen by God, justified by God and will all be glorified
 - But whether we reach spiritual maturity is an open question
 - And it depends on our willingness to yield to the Spirit's direction

- Chapter 1 has taken us through an examination of trials and temptations
 - And I think I can sum up what we've learned in a few simple words
 - Trials are reasons for joy
 - They are tests from the Lord and give us opportunity to show Him how much we've matured
 - How much He has grown us through the Spirit of the Lord working in us
 - And we pass them when we seek wisdom from the Lord and listen to His direction
 - They are open book tests so long as we are willing to rest, remain stable, in His instruction
 - Temptations are a different kind of trial, the natural result of our sinful nature
 - And there is a process by which they lead us into sin
 - And if we seek the Lord's strength and wisdom to confront those temptations, He will give us a way to escape them
 - The Lord is prepared to appoint an eternal reward to those who succeed in these tests
 - Paul affirms this teaching in a short passage from Colossians

Col. 1:9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

Col. 1:10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Col. 1:11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously

Col. 1:12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

- James has said repeatedly that the solution to facing trials and temptations is to seek God's wisdom
- And I defined that process as seeking God in His word and in prayer
 - But now James concludes the chapter on trials by focusing on one of those ways: God's word

James 1:19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;

James 1:20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

James 1:21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of

wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

- If we are to understand these verses, we have to keep them together
 - The “hearing” James mentions in v.19 is related to the “receiving” that he mentions in v.21
 - James starts by saying, “This you know, brethren.”
 - They know what James has been teaching...
 - They know that the Father is all light, and brought us forth by His will to make us a first fruit among creatures
 - But they aren’t living according to that knowledge
 - They were likely reacting in anger and doubt over the trials they were experiencing
 - They were speaking instead of listening
 - So James says this you know, but...
 - But everyone should be quick to hear
 - In the day this letter was written, people didn’t have personal copies of the Bible (Old Testament)
 - The scriptures were kept in the synagogue and were read aloud during the weekly services
 - So when James says be quick to hear, he’s talking about quick to receive God’s word in the way it was received in that day – by hearing
 - Listening to God’s word was to take the place of speaking and anger
- James says that we know that trials are tests, but just knowing that fact won’t be enough in many cases to get us through the trial in a godly way
 - We or our spouse or child may have a life-threatening illness
 - We may lose our job, our spouse has an affair, our business fails
 - Or a million other circumstances of life come along
 - And they bring stress and worry and fear
 - And we may remember that God is testing our spiritual maturity, and our response is being graded
 - And we know we are supposed to seek God’s wisdom in His word or in prayer
 - But then we start to tell ourselves things
 - We say it’s unfair, that God is treating us this way
 - We say unkind things against the people in our lives who are involved in the trials
 - We strike out at others in frustration

- We tell ourselves nothing God has told us matters, that there's nothing in God's word that can help us deal with our situation
 - We entertain thoughts of self pity
- And maybe we get angry and frustrated, and start looking for ways to escape our trial
 - We turn to the world for wisdom or help
- These are the ways our flesh respond to trials, but it's not the godly way to respond
- James says the anger of men can't produce the righteousness of God
 - And producing the righteousness of God is the whole point of the trial
 - God wants to grow us
 - He wants to give us opportunity to show our growth
 - He doesn't bring trials to frustrate us...unless frustrating us is the best way to mature us
 - But if we stubbornly persist in letting our flesh drive our response to trials, we won't grow
 - We'll just see more anger and frustration and despair
- Instead be quick to hear God's word (read it) but be slow to speak
 - As in my examples, speaking refers to our tendency to explain or rationalize our circumstances to ourselves
 - We talk to ourselves and others about why something has happened or how we should respond
 - We talk so much in fact, that we stop listening
 - Winston Churchill once said, "'Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.'"
 - If we are truly going to hear God's own wisdom and direction as we contend with trials, we have to first silence the voice in our head and in our mouth
 - Remember Psalm 46:10

**Psa. 46:10 Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!**

- So then James gives us the secret to receiving God's wisdom in a trial
 - In v.21 he says, receive God's word in humility
 - The word for humility is *prautes* which means meekness
 - We have to humble ourselves, eliminate the pride from our response to trials
 - We don't deserve anything, God doesn't owe us anything

- We have nothing good in us save for Christ Himself
- And trials are good for us

"We pray for safety instead of purity because we do not see impurity as dangerous." – George Stulac

- We pray for health and wealth and ease because those things sound good to our flesh
 - But when the Father sends us trials instead, we respond in ungodly ways if we fail to recognize the goodness of God in those trials
- Because everything we need to face trials is available from God as well

2Pet. 1:2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord;

2Pet. 1:3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

- Did you notice that both Peter and James refer to this word as something already granted, already in you, implanted in you?
 - James says the word of God is implanted in you, which is the word that saves your souls
 - The word “soul” in Greek means the whole life, or the full measure of the person’s earthly life
 - God’s word is the way we are saved, and that word is also a Person Who lives in us
 - And we “receive” that Word when we turn to it and seek His counsel over our own voice and emotions
 - When we understand our circumstances from His perspective
 - So when we are suffering from illness and feeling weak, we hear God’s word tell us that our body is going to fail...look forward to the new body
 - When our businesses fail, God reminds us that our eternal business is to seek first the righteousness of God
 - These words are words of life that can save our souls
 - Receiving the word implanted in us means yielding to the instruction of the word as the Spirit convicts us and prompts us to a different walk
- But once we receive God’s word, we have to act upon what we hear

James 1:22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

James 1:23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;

James 1:24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.

James 1:25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

- If there was one indictment against the evangelical Christian today, it might be that many have become merely hearers of the word rather than doers
 - This is the classic critique of Bible churches
 - Groups of Christians who give lip service to the Bible and to God's word
 - We love to read it, we love to study it, we put the word on our sign out front
 - But do we let it change our thoughts and actions?
- Let's break down what James is saying here
 - James says prove yourselves doers of the word
 - The word "prove" in Greek means something that has been done or accomplished
 - Demonstrating through action
 - And in the context of trials, it refers to living according to God's word in the midst of a trial
 - James sets up a choice of two paths once we have consulted God's word
 - We can hear it and tell ourselves we're OK
 - We assume it's talking about someone else
 - We sit in the pew and say to ourselves, I hope so-and-so is listening to the pastor this morning
 - That point was meant for them (but not us)
 - We delude ourselves either by thinking it was written for someone else
 - Or we assume we're already living according to God's word
 - This is a Pharisaical way of thinking, because it's rooted in an overly positive view of self
 - And an unteachable heart
 - Ultimately, it's pride rather than humility
 - James uses a beautiful analogy to describe that kind of person
 - The word of God is like a mirror, in the way it causes us to examine ourselves in an honest and true way
 - It speaks with authority and truth, and the Spirit in us takes those words and uses them to convict us of our sin

- In that way, hearing the word of God is like seeing ourselves in a mirror
- I don't know about you, but I don't really like staring at myself in a mirror
 - The longer I look, the more imperfections I notice
 - The less I like my appearance
 - I seem to remember myself as looking better
 - But then I study my features in a mirror, and stark reality hits home

Three recent college graduates visit their pastor seeking advice on their careers. The pastor tells them that there is a magic mirror in his office. If they can look into the mirror and tell the truth about how they could serve God, He would respond instantly in answering their prayer. But if they look into the mirror and lie, they would instantly disappear and go directly to hell.

The UT graduate walks in, looks in the mirror and says, "I think I will become a successful business man and use my wealth to support missionaries." Instantly, he sees a vision of himself in his corner office at the top of a New York skyscraper.

The Texas Tech graduate walks in, looks in the mirror and says, "I think I will become a successful Christian author who reaches the lost with the Gospel." Instantly, he sees a vision of his books at the top of the bestseller list.

Finally, the Texas A&M grad walks in, looks in the mirror, and says, "I think..." Instantly, he disappears.

- So if we look into the mirror of God's word, we need to come with an honest heart ready to learn something about ourselves
 - And if we learn something from that self-inspection, we have to put it into action
 - Unlike the person who sees the problems in the mirror, but instead of addressing the problems, the person just leave the bathroom
 - It's as if we can't see the problems, then we don't have any
- Instead, James says we need to act differently
 - In v.25 James says look into the mirror of God's word, the perfect law of Liberty
 - The word for "look" is *parakupto*, which means to stoop down to get a better look, to study intently
 - And we're looking at the entire truth of Scripture, the law of liberty which isn't the Law of Moses
 - It's the entirety of God's word, the full measure of God's revelation that brings freedom and grace

- And power, as Peter said, to face our trials successfully
- Remember that James' audience were Jews who had recently come to faith and learned that they were no longer compelled to keep the Law of Moses
 - But then we said that raised a problem for some who now wondered if they had any obligation to do anything in response to their faith
 - They were still willing to hear God's word, but they had come to think that the only proper response was to keep the Mosaic Law
 - But if the law was no longer a requirement, then what do they do
 - Imagine new Christians without the Christian culture to guide their service to God? It resulted in an aimless life
- Stoop down, study it, learn God's word intently
 - And as you stare into the perfect word, abide by it
 - And such a man is blessed in what he does
- We're not talking about being busy
 - James is arguing for us to be better Christians simply by assuming a more active Christian lifestyle
 - The context of the first chapter is facing trials
 - And in that context being a "doer" means being someone who puts God's wisdom and instruction into action
- When you put God's words and His instructions into action, you will be blessed in what you do
 - But if you hear from God in His word, consider it, but then never take the steps to put it into action in your own life, you are the forgetful hearer
 - And ironically, if we get busy in the church doing things
 - Serving in one way or another
 - But we never take the word of God and actually apply it in our own lives, we may feel like we're the "doer" James asks us to be
 - But in reality, we're still the forgetful hearer
 - We're still the one who looks at ourselves, and instead of hearing and taking steps to adjust our life to Christ...
 - We're distracting ourselves by our works at religion, at doing Christian things instead of being a Christian
- James ends the chapter with exactly this kind of exhortation

James 1:26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

- Who is the one who thinks himself “religious”?
 - The word in Greek is *threskos*, and it means someone who fears or worships God
 - We’re still talking about a believer
 - But the point is a believer who sees himself as someone doing the right things in keeping with their faith
 - Someone who lives his faith properly
 - James says if someone thinks he has already achieved the perfect reflection in that mirror
 - And they can look upon God’s word, hear it, and come away thinking there is nothing they need to change in their lives
 - Then that Christian is the one who thinks himself religious, according to James
 - To that person, James offers a simple test: can you bridle your tongue?
 - Is everything you say to yourself and everyone else perfectly in accordance to God’s word?
 - You never lie, you never gossip, you never utter a hurtful word, you never speak out of pride or arrogance?
 - If we can’t even control something as small as our tongue – never mind the rest of our bodies
 - Then we deceive ourselves if we think there is nothing in our lives we need to change in response to God’s word
 - And in trials, we are going to fail rather than be blessed because we are going to rely on our own thoughts and instincts
 - That kind of religion is worthless, but its worthlessness is in respect to ourselves, not God
 - It’s not God Who loses out, it’s us
 - It’s worthless to us, because it leaves us self-deceived and without the possibility of receiving the blessing God offers to obedience in trials
- If you want a picture of what pure religion looks like to God, a pure response to God’s word
 - It involves an external and internal change
 - Externally, it takes the form of ministering to those who have nothing to offer in return
 - A selfless act of love
 - Consider the power of that idea
 - You are suffering in trials, and your response after consulting God’s word is to go to others who are even more vulnerable to trials and minister to them
 - Leave your pity party and seek to serve others in their time of need
 - Notice the widows and orphans are in a time of distress themselves

- Finally, the inward change is to keep oneself unstained by the world
 - Do you want to be a doer of the word?
 - It isn't measured by the busyness of your religious activities
 - Or the accomplishments of your ministry
 - It's measured by the degree of Christlikeness in your life
- Stare at God's word, compare it to the reflection of your own life, and be prepared to make the necessary changes to conform yourself to the One who is revealed in its pages

A new crown in the shape of a laurel wreath was made for King Hiero II in ancient Greece. Well-known Greek mathematician Archimedes was asked to determine whether it was made of solid gold, or whether silver had been added by a dishonest goldsmith. Archimedes had to find a way to test the crown's composition without damaging the crown, so he could not melt it down to calculate its density.

While taking a bath, Archimedes noticed that the level of the water in the tub rose as he got in, and realized that this effect could be used to determine the volume of the crown and thus the purity of its gold. By submerging the crown in water, it would displace an amount of water equal to its own volume. He could then compare the amount of water displaced by the crown to the amount displaced by a pure gold brick of equal weight.

If the crown displaced less water weight than the pure brick, it would be proven to contain metals other than gold. Archimedes was so excited by his discovery, he jumped from his bath and ran through the streets naked, crying "Eureka! I have found it!"

- Archimedes had discovered a way to measure the purity of a gold crown by means of a simple, nondestructive test
 - By submerging the crown in water
 - This story can be useful as a great picture for understanding the main thrust of James' letter
 - His letter describes how the Lord uses simple tests to determine the purity of our faith
 - The Greek word for test back in James 1:3 is *dokimion*, which means to prove or show the purity of something
 - So the testing of our faith, according to James, ultimately produces the perfecting or proving the purity of our faith
 - By removing the impurities of our walk
 - So we could say that the Lord is at work in our life testing the purity of our faith to show whether it is contaminated with impurities of one kind or another
 - And like Archimedes' water test, the test the Lord sends are nondestructive in the sense that they aren't sent to destroy us but to build us up
 - In Chapter 1, James discussed how the Lord uses trials or difficulties as a means of testing our faith
 - And in Chapter 2, James describes two additional methods of testing
 - The chapter opens with an examination of how God tests our faith by our responses to people from varying social backgrounds

- Later in the chapter, James moves to a third test, which we will address when we get there
- Turning to the second test now, James says:

James 2:1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

- The second testing of faith comes on the issue of favoritism
 - There is an interesting Greek word used here for personal favoritism: *proso-polemp-sia*
 - It's a translation of a Hebrew idiom which literally means to "lift up the face"
 - The point of the idiom is that lifting our face to someone is to show them our favor or attention to the exclusion of others
 - James says don't hold (the Greek word actually means accompany or join) your faith in Christ with favoritism among men
 - Again, we're talking about a man or woman of faith who is acting wrongly in that faith...failing a test in that sense
 - James now moves to using examples to make his point clearer

James 2:2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,

James 2:3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,"

James 2:4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

- The setting for this example is your assembly, but the word in Greek for assembly is *sunagoge*, which is the Greek transliteration of synagogue
- Remember, this letter was written to Jewish Christians, who still attended the synagogue as the way to worship Christ
 - Two different men enter the assembly, and the contrast between the men is clear
 - One is wearing fine clothing, or gorgeous apparel
 - While the other is clearly poor, as evidenced by his dirty (or filthy) clothes
 - The rich man is known to be rich by his gold ring, my Bible reads
 - But in Greek the phrase is a "gold-fingered man" which suggested he had many rings on his fingers
 - So he is not just rich, but obviously rich
 - And likewise, the poor man is obviously poor

- And it's in this visibility of wealth or social status where we find a test developing for the believers in this assembly
 - The test is how we choose to think and act in response to that show of wealth
 - And the key to passing the test, as before, is to think and act like God thinks and acts
 - Relying on godly wisdom, led by the Spirit
- In vs. 3-4, James presents an indictment and describes the crime
- As each of these men walk in to the assembly, you pay special attention to the rich man
 - The Greek word for special attention means regard with favor
 - The rich man looks wealthy and so this leads the usher to guide the man to a good seating place
 - Likewise, the poor man is given a lowly position in the assembly
 - There are two errors or sins committed here
 - And they are committed not only by the one who selects the seats, but by association everyone in the assembly who would see that decision as proper is also culpable
- The first sin was in making a judgment of each person's worth, and then responding to each person in a different way based on that judgment
 - James says in v.4 that they have made distinctions among themselves
 - The assembly is showing favor to one man over another
 - And regardless of the basis for that judgment, the very fact that we make distinctions is wrong – period
 - This fact alone is wrong, and it means they failed the testing of their faith
- Our faith should bring with it an understanding that all men have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
- Our faith also understands that by Christ's blood we have all been made new creatures and are seated with Christ in the heavenly realm
 - We are brothers and sisters in Christ without distinction in worth or value to God
 - So when we look upon our brothers and sisters in Christ and assume one to be better or more important than another, we sin
 - We aren't looking at each other with eyes of faith; we're relying on worldly eyes
 - Rich people aren't more important or more special than poor people in God's economy
 - Good looking people aren't better either
 - Neither are smarter people, famous people, UT grads, etc.
 - Any attempt to re-establish that kind of worldly ranking system in the church is simply sinful, and ungodly
 - When we see people in these ways in the Body of Christ, we sin because we

fail to operate in godly wisdom

- We are living in our flesh

- There was a time months ago when one of our elders received a call from a representative of a TV celebrity
 - This celebrity was in town to shoot an episode of a TV program
 - And the representative called the church to let us know that the celebrity and a small number of guests might arrive for one of our Sunday services
 - We told the person that we would welcome them no differently than we would any visitor
 - We hoped their arrival wouldn't be a distraction from the Sunday service, but we wondered what effect it might have
- In the end they never showed up
 - But if you think about it, just the fact they thought they needed to call beforehand says something about the church today
 - It suggests that celebrity has found its way into the Christian thinking and this person knew from experience that they needed to prepare a congregation for their arrival
 - Perhaps it's an understandable concern, but it's still sad
 - If the celebrity had arrived at Oak Hill Bible Church, would we have passed this test of faith? The test of favoritism?
 - Would we have seen them as merely another visiting brother or sister in the Lord?
 - Would our welcoming have been different, even in small ways?
 - Would we have shown them to the best seat?
 - Would we have handed them a bulletin or a cup or water or a donut when we might not have done the same for another visitor?
- I think we're generally very welcoming to every visitor, and I know we would have done the same to this celebrity
 - But I still think it would have been a real test for some of us, myself included
 - To not just act normally, but to truly see the person with eyes for eternity
 - To simply see them as a sinner saved by grace and no different than anyone else
 - That's the test James is teaching about, and it's obvious from the letter that he has concerns that these churches were failing the test regularly
- In v.4 James says that our favoritism for the rich Christian over the poor one stems from evil motives
- What "evil motives" do we have for making distinctions between rich and poor in the church?
 - If we're honest with ourselves, the answer comes easily
 - We favor a person who looks rich because we have a secret hope that they will

return our favor by using their wealth to reward us

- Perhaps they will reward us personally or just reward the church
- But either way, it's the lure of money that causes us to think and act sinfully
- That's the evil motive that James is referencing

The admissions counselor for a seminary was interviewing a prospective student.

"Why have you chosen a career in ministry?" he asked.

"I dream of making a million dollars in ministry, just like my father," the student replied.

"Your father made a million dollars in ministry???" the counselor exclaimed, much impressed.

"No," replied the applicant. "But he always dreamed of it."

- Remember the test came because the man was obviously rich
 - We see the wealth and the wheels begin turning, subconsciously maybe
 - We need to put those thoughts aside and replace them with the wisdom of God's word
 - James offers that wisdom...

James 2:5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

James 2:6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?

James 2:7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

- James gives us God's view of rich and poor
 - God chose the poor of the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom
 - But when we show the poor scorn or simply dismiss them, we dishonor that person
 - The Greek word is *atimazo* which means treat shamefully
 - We treat them as if we are ashamed of them or for them
 - But God has chosen them and made them rich in the things that matter, spiritual things
 - If we saw them with eyes for eternity, knowing they share the same future we have, then we wouldn't shame them
 - Consider this...they may earn more treasure in the coming kingdom and be the "rich" person in the future kingdom

- And what kind of eternal reward might we have if we spend this life treating God's chosen in a callous or shameful way?
- By the way, James' statement that God chose the poor is echoed in Paul's later letter to the Corinthian church

1Cor. 1:26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;
1Cor. 1:27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,
1Cor. 1:28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,
1Cor. 1:29 so that no man may boast before God.

- Speaking to a church made up of societal misfits, Paul says that was exactly the way God intended things to be
 - God chose or selected those who would become a part of the church in Corinth from among the poor and socially disadvantaged in the culture
 - And He did so for a specific reason, so that at the time of judgment God could shame the wise and powerful of this world
- While the least of the world are lifted up by faith and receive a glorious inheritance
 - Those of the world thought to be rich and powerful will be shown to be “wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked”
 - As Jesus described them in Revelation 3:17
- This principle has its exceptions, of course
 - Not every poor person will become a follower of Christ
 - And some rich and powerful will be called to faith in Christ
- But the general principle will remain true throughout history until our Lord's return
 - You see that principle reflected in the story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16
 - Or in the way Jesus said it's virtually impossible for a rich man to enter heaven
- James moves on that not only is this differentiation sinful, it's also fruitless
 - The rich don't respond to our favoritism by throwing their money around
 - They take it for granted, and ultimately become the oppressors of society, especially if they are fighting to keep their wealth
 - James gives another general truth, that the rich and powerful tend to speak out against Christians and Christ
 - If you have doubts about these principles, just pay attention to the entertainment and political celebrities of our day or any day
 - Do they tend to honor and respect Christians and Christ?

- Do they tend to live godly lives and strive to be Christ-like?
- Again, I'm not suggesting and nor is Scripture teaching that the rich man has no hope and that all poor people are good
 - But there is a general principle at work in God's economy and we should understand it and let it inform our opinions about people
 - Bottom line: Don't show favoritism
- Instead of failing these tests by sinning in favoritism, James teaches us to live differently

James 2:8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,” you are doing well.

James 2:9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

- In v.8, James commands us to live according to the Royal Law
 - Some call it the Golden Rule
 - Love your neighbor as you love yourself
 - Remember Jesus was asked which commandment in the Law was the most important
 - Jesus answered that the most important was to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength
 - And the second most important is to love your neighbor as you love yourself
 - James is taking for granted that his readers have understood the first commandment having come to faith in Christ
 - And now he is reminding us that we have a responsibility to fulfill the second one just as much
 - If we treat every person as we would treat ourselves if we were on the receiving end, then we are following the Royal Law and we are doing well
 - Showing partiality among people for any reason is incompatible with keeping this commandment of Christ
 - Have you ever considered that implication?
 - Christ gave two broad commandments for Christians under the New Covenant
 - Love God
 - Love your neighbor
 - And James says unequivocally that when we show partiality within the Body of Christ, we fail at this second commandment
 - We sin and transgress the Law of Christ
- Next week, James moves forward into an examination of this law and how we may run afoul of it

- But to close today, let's just establish the basic truth that there is a law in effect for the Christian
 - We may already know and understand that as Christians we are not under the Law given in the Old Covenant
 - By Christ's fulfillment of the Law's requirements, He has met its terms for us
 - And by faith, we are credited with that work
 - So the Old Covenant has been fulfilled in Christ's work and no longer requires our work...we have ceased from that work
- But some Christians go too far and assume that we have no law at all
 - They believe that no rules exist to guide our behavior
 - And they are wrong, since Jesus Himself gave us the Law for Christians under the New Covenant
 - The Laws are the two I mentioned earlier, and Scripture calls these two laws the Law of Liberty or the Law of Christ
- James is about to explore the Law for a moment in this chapter, but he makes clear here that favoritism is one way we violate that Law
 - And just as there are consequences for violating the Law of Moses in the days of the Old Covenant
 - There are consequences for violating the Law of Christ

James 2B

- After a two week break, it can be difficult to find our way back into the writer's line of thought
 - But with a few minutes of review, I'm confident we can pick back up again
 - In the first half of James' second chapter, he was discussing the final test of our faith
 - The test was how we respond to Christians according to their social distinctions
 - When confronted by a brother or sister with a high social status, will we follow our flesh and show favoritism hoping to gain their favor?
 - Or will we remain indifferent to social status treating all Christians the same, and thus gain favor with the Lord?
 - James said if we show favoritism within the Body of Christ we are making judgments based on evil motives
 - More importantly, when we show favoritism, we are not operating according to the Royal Law, the Law of Christ which rules over the New Testament believer
 - We will have broken the Law of Christ, James says
 - We will not have treated our neighbor as we hoped to be treated
 - Now in the remaining part of his second chapter and into the third chapter, James begins to explore the consequences of failing these tests
 - And last time, James told us that failing these tests was a violation of God's law
 - But more specifically, the Law we violate is the Law of Christ
 - Or the Royal Law as James calls it
 - In v.12, he also calls it the Law of Liberty
 - And having mentioned this Law and our risk of transgressing it, James now moves into a sidebar discussion concerning our responsibilities to that law

James 2:9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

James 2:10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

James 2:11 For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

- To repeat, James teaches that showing partiality makes us transgressors of law
 - Earlier in v.8 he had specified that the law in view here is not the Law of Moses

- It was a different law, the royal law
- And that law was the two-part commandment that Jesus Himself said summed up the entirety of God's Law
 - Love your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength
 - Love your neighbor as yourself
- Partiality violated the second part of that commandment
- Then James adds that whoever keeps the whole law but fails in keeping just one point has become guilty of all
 - The phrase "whoever keeps the Law" here describes the thinking of an individual, not their actual behavior
 - Someone who believes he is keeping the whole Law
 - But then that person makes a single mistake
 - James offers an example from the Ten Commandments
 - Someone who keeps one of them, but then fails to keep another
 - That person is just as assuredly a transgressor of the Law as someone who had broken both of them
 - James is not teaching that all offenses are equally bad or will result in an equal consequence
 - God's Law has always had varying degrees of punishment for differing offenses
 - Said another way, while it is worse to violate two laws than to violate just one law, it is not better that we violate one law instead of two
 - Because even just one violation offends the Law Giver
 - Edmond Hiebert said:

Our obedience to God's will cannot be on a selective basis; we cannot choose that part that is to our liking and disregard the rest. God's will is not fragmentary; the entire law is the expression of His will for His people; it constitutes a grand unity. To break out one corner of a window pane is to become guilty of breaking the whole pane.

- So when we show partiality, James says we not only fail to love our neighbor as we love ourselves
 - But we also fail to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength
- In that sense, our faith and love for God is closely interconnected with our behavior (or our works)
 - When we fail in our behaviors, we are working against or in opposition to our confession of faith
 - We weaken our confession and limit its usefulness to us and God

- Then James gives us the consequence of failing to live out our faith in keeping with God's expectations

James 2:12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.

James 2:13 For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

- We will be judged by the Law of Liberty
 - The Law of Liberty is the standard of conduct for every believer
 - This Law replaces the Law of Moses, which condemned us prior to faith
- Paul describes the transition in several places in the New Testament, but to summarize the point we can look at two short passages

Rom. 7:1 Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?

Rom. 7:2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband.

Rom. 7:3 So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.

Rom. 7:4 Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

Rom. 7:5 For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.

Rom. 7:6 But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter

- Before faith, we were “wedded” to the Law of Moses, which only served to condemn us
 - And like marriage, we weren’t eligible to wed Christ until there was a death in our first marriage to the Law
 - But when we came to faith, our spouse (the Law) didn’t die...we did
 - We were seen as dying, in the sense that we died in Christ on the cross
 - Then we were born again into a new marriage with a new groom...Christ
 - And that new relationship brought a new standard of behavior
 - A standard Paul calls the ministry of the Spirit, rather than a ministry of the letter of the Law of Moses

- We now follow the Spirit of Christ rather than the letter of law
- Paul says it another way in 2 Corinthians:

2Cor. 3:5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God,

2Cor. 3:6 who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

2Cor. 3:15 But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart;

2Cor. 3:16 but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

2Cor. 3:17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

- Paul was a servant of a new covenant that didn't originate in the letter of the old Law
 - But it comes from the Spirit to give eternal life
 - And today the Law is still read in the synagogue by Jews, but it has no effect in converting them to Christ because the truth is hidden from them
 - But when they turn to Christ, the veil is removed, and they receive His Spirit
 - And having received the Spirit, they now have liberty
- Liberty doesn't mean freedom to sin
 - Liberty means freedom to follow God's Spirit in obedience to His will knowing that our righteousness has already been obtained
 - And as such, it becomes a test of our love for our Lord
 - The situation could be compared to a son working for his father's business, trying to earn enough money for retirement
 - The son worked hard to do everything his job required because he was striving to reach his retirement goal
 - But then unexpectedly, the son receives a gift of money from the father that's large enough to take care of him for the rest of his life

Like the story of the old man when asked by a younger man how he made his money. In response, the gentleman said...

"Well, son, it was 1932. The depth of the Great Depression. I was down to my last nickel. I invested that nickel in an apple. I spent the entire day polishing the apple and, at the end of the day, I sold the apple for ten cents.

The next morning, I invested those ten cents in two apples. I spent the entire day polishing them and sold them at 5:00pm for 20 cents. I continued this system for a month, by the end of which I'd accumulated a fortune of \$1.37. Then my father-in-law died and left us two million dollars."

- Before the gift arrived, the son's relationship to his father had been defined by the rules of the job
 - Because that was what was required to earn what the son needed
 - He was restricted to working according to the rules of his job
 - He wasn't free to do otherwise, since he was in jeopardy without his retirement secured
 - And his hard work only served to remind him of how far he was from reaching his goal
 - It was just a yoke and burden
- But now that the gift has arrived, the son has been freed from the burdens and restrictions of his job
 - He can begin a new phase of his relationship with the father now that his retirement goal had already been reached
 - The son can now serve his father in new ways that were never possible before while he was trying to earn his security
- Previously, his father's test of obedience would have been how well the son performed his job according to the rules of that job
 - But now that he no longer needed to work, the test becomes whether the son will obey and follow his father's desires apart from the rules of the job
 - And the test becomes a test of love
 - A measure of his love for his father
- Our Father in Heaven will make a similar assessment of us at our moment of judgment
 - We have already been given our place in the kingdom, and our eternal salvation is assured based on a gift of faith
 - That gift has freed us from following the letter of the Law of Moses...of earning salvation
 - Through Christ's perfect life, we are already credited with having lived the Law perfectly
 - So we no longer need to attempt to live it as a means of pleasing God
 - But then the question becomes how we will serve the Lord now that we have been freed from the need to work for salvation?
 - James teaches that we are expected to obey according to the Spirit
 - Which means following God's direction in our life by listening to the Spirit's call and direction on our life
 - And the Spirit's intent will always be to draw us toward living out the royal law or the law of liberty
 - But when we fail to live according to that law, we should know we are grieving the Spirit
 - We are no longer walking in the Spirit, we are walking in our flesh

- And that decision will bring consequences, just as violating the Law of Moses brings consequences
- James says in v.13 that judgment awaits the one who fails to show mercy
 - James mentions mercy here because he's speaking about the consequences of showing favoritism
 - When we show favoritism to one believer over another, we are the one who has failed to show mercy
 - Because we have made a judgment against the poor brother and in favor of a rich brother
 - We fail to show mercy to that poor brother
 - And therefore we shouldn't expect the Lord to show us mercy either
 - The Lord will be merciless to us as well, which means He will show favor to other believers over us
 - Just as we were showing favor to one believer over another
 - And of course, this same distinction will be made when we fail any test of faith, be it mercy or love or obedience in any form
 - There are consequences in how the Lord will judge us
 - Remembering that judgment is for the purpose of reward, not a judgment concerning salvation
 - But that judgment is a strict one, and our behavior in following the Spirit is not one to be taken lightly

Heb. 10:26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

Heb. 10:27 but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.

Heb. 10:28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Heb. 10:29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

Heb. 10:30 For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE."

Heb. 10:31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

- The judgment fire the writer describes here aren't the fires of hell but the judgment fire that tests the quality of our work
 - And if there were severe punishments allotted to those who violated the Old Covenant, how great will the consequences be for those who disobey the Law of a new better covenant

- The writer says it will be a terrifying thing
- Paul also uses fire to describe that judgment moment for believers:

1Cor. 3:11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1Cor. 3:12 Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

1Cor. 3:13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

1Cor. 3:14 If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.

1Cor. 3:15 If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

- Now keeping in mind that this is the judgment moment that James has in view, he begins to discuss the relationship with faith and works for a believer

James 2:14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

James 2:15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,

James 2:16 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?

James 2:17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

- James asks what use is it to have faith but no works
 - The word for use is *ophelos*, which means profit or advantage
 - So James is asking how can faith without works profit a believer?
 - Said another way, how do we expect to profit from a faith that is absent works?
 - Remember, there is no credit awarded at the judgment for simply having faith
 - Paul says that:

Eph. 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

Eph. 2:9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

- So we can't expect to receive our Lord's congratulations and thanks merely for believing
 - That was a work He did in the first place
 - And it will be nothing to boast about

- So our faith must yield works if we expect to profit or receive eternal praise and reward
- So James then asks if a believer has faith but no works, can that faith save him?
 - This question has led countless Christians to two conclusions, both of which miss James' point
 - First, some have thought that James is teaching that works are a necessary component for salvation
 - That we must have faith *and* works to obtain the righteousness necessary for salvation
 - But as Paul explained concerning himself

Phil. 3:8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, **Phil. 3:9** and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

- The second misinterpretation is that James is describing a non-Christian or a person who has made a false confession
 - That when someone confesses Christ, they will always have works
 - And if they lack works, it must mean they lack true faith
 - Therefore, can that “faith” save him?
- But this second view is equally wrong, based on the context of James
 - James hasn't been discussing true faith vs. false faith
 - James has been discussing the failure of believers to live according to the royal law
 - And in the immediately preceding verses, James introduced the subject of the judgment fire that will test each believer's work
 - So in that context James is asking if a faith that has no works will save a believer
 - He's not discussing unbelievers facing the judgment fires of hell...that's the wrong context
- James is talking about a believer facing the judgment fire of the Bema Seat, the Judgment Seat of Christ (e.g., 1 Corinthians 3)
- So when James asks can that faith “save him,” he's asking if a faith lived without works will save the believer when he stands at the fiery Judgment Seat of Christ
 - This is the judgment fire that tests our work and reveals our reward, as Paul described
 - And of course a believer who enters that moment without works should not expect to be “saved” from that judgment
 - On the contrary, for that Christian the judgment seat of Christ will be a terrifying

experience as the writer of Hebrews says

- Such a believer has lived a life of stubborn disobedience to the Spirit's call
- He has transgressed the Royal Law, the Law of Liberty
 - And he will not be saved from the consequences of those choices
 - He will face a merciless judgment, as James says
- Then James offers a particularly convicting example to consider
 - He asks if a Christian expresses concern for a fellow believer who is poor and in need, but then does nothing material to help address the believer's needs
 - Of what use is that response?
 - The word "use" is again the Greek word for profit or advantage
 - So James asks how can that unhelpful response profit anyone?
 - It certainly doesn't profit the needy believer, who is still without the food and clothing they need
 - And it doesn't profit the believer himself, who failed to perform a work of mercy and will not receive Christ's approval at the judgment moment
 - Remember, meeting fellow believers' needs is an act of mercy in itself
 - So our failure to act is a failure to show mercy in these circumstances
 - And it will result in the Lord refraining from showing us mercy at the judgment
 - And our failures will not profit us
- Finally, James makes his most provocative statement
 - Faith without works is dead, being by itself
 - By "dead," James means it is lifeless, without benefit to men or God or even to the believer himself
 - It is dead in the same way that a campfire can appear dead
 - It's not actually gone, since there may still be hot embers deep in the ashes
 - But with the flame having gone out, it appears lifeless and it offers little value to anyone unless and until the coals are stoked aflame again
- We have plenty to think about in these verses
 - We should examine ourselves in light of these scriptures
 - First, are we thinking about our actions and priorities with an eye toward our judgment moment?
 - Do we consider how we are impacting that moment when we make decisions about where to spend our time or money or talents?
 - Do we remember the royal law as we consider our actions at work and in the home or in the Body of Christ?
 - Are we ready to meet the Lord right now? Or do we have some work to do to show the Lord that our faith is not a dead faith, one that profits no one?

- Let's recommit to living our faith outwardly, intending to show the love of Christ and thereby have much to profit from

- After what we heard from James last week, I'm surprised you've returned
 - I certainly felt convicted over what James taught
 - And I acknowledge this is tough material
 - I didn't structure my teaching with an intent to entertain or sooth with light-hearted stories
 - What I did do – and am doing – is wrestle with this text for hours and days
 - Because my job is to get this right, as best I can
 - And then my job is to share it with you as God has revealed it to me
 - And to leave it to the Holy Spirit to tell you what to do with what you learn
 - And I admit that makes for one heck of a downer sometimes
 - But if you're like me, the conviction soon gives way to this thrilling recognition of how awesome our God is
 - And of how important my life is to God, that I can live in such a way that I bring Him glory
 - And nothing matters more to God than His glory
 - And I get excited at the prospect of serving Him in the days He gives me
 - And then I see the wisdom of God's word in the way it propels me forward into a life that does good works
- We ended on v.17, as James makes his point clear
 - If our faith doesn't yield good works to the glory of God, is it a useless faith
 - It is useless for others who are in need of our works of charity and service
 - It is useless to ourselves because our eternal reward is based on works done in faith
 - If we arrive at the judgment moment without works, we will come through the judgment moment empty handed
 - Most importantly, a faith absent works is useless to God
 - As Jesus said:

Matt. 5:16 “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

- The light is a symbol for our faith in the Gospel, and Jesus told us to let our faith shine in such a way that the world sees our good works and glorify God
- As I reflected on this part of James' letter, I was forced to confront many assumptions I have made about my own life and about scripture itself
 - Perhaps you have done the same thing this week
- I wondered if I was pleasing the Lord in my works

- I hope He is pleased in my teaching and pastoring
- But even if that were true, is He pleased with my works as a husband, or father or in my secret thoughts?
 - Is he pleased in my prayer life or in the way I spend my money or in the way I spend my free time?
- I found myself asking more and more what will the Lord say to me on my judgment day about these things
- And in terms of Scripture, I've found myself taking a second look at a number of passages where Jesus or other New Testament writers tell us to take the judgment seat moment seriously
 - Paul, for example, describes the judgment seat of Christ this way:

2Cor. 5:9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

2Cor. 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

2Cor. 5:11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.

- Paul says we should have as our ambition to be pleasing to Christ
 - Knowing we will be judged by Him and rewarded accordingly
 - And Paul adds, whether good or bad
 - There can be a bad outcome to that judgment
 - And a bad judgment is the result of a Christian who lives a life without striving to please His Master
 - That's a life lived without a fear of the Lord
- Look how Paul begins his next thought...knowing the fear of the Lord
 - Have you wondered why Paul was so tireless in his efforts to spread the Gospel?
 - Why did Paul place himself in harms way and endure such misery at times?
 - And why did he do it willingly?
 - He says he did it because he knew the fear of the Lord
 - And he let his fear and respect and awe and desire to please His Lord drive him to a life of good works
- So in Chapter 2 up to verse 17, James has made this simple argument
 - We must pay attention to how we respond to the tests of our faith
 - We must take these test seriously and set our mind to passing them

- And “passing a test” is an opportunity to do good deeds or good works
- In fact, we must set our minds on the goal of living a Christian life that produces good works of faith
 - By serving in our gift, seeking ways to spread the Gospel and in all we do glorifying God
- James then argues we must be dedicated to this path, because we are to be judged according to the Law of Liberty
 - This judgment is one of works, not a judgment for sin
 - But it still brings the possibility of a bad outcome
 - And if we haven’t shown works of mercy, then why should we expect our judge to show mercy to us at that moment?
 - Instead we will see a harsh judgment
 - Because that will be the outcome for a believer who lives a life absent good works
 - They will have a faith, but it is a dead, useless faith
- Now James was a smart man, and he was guided by the Holy Spirit
 - So he anticipated what some might argue to refute his concerns
 - James anticipated that some might try to counter his argument and claim that Christians do not need to worry about such things
 - And he offers that argument in v.18

James 2:18 But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

- James speaks as if he were an objector, who disagreed with James’ argument
 - Now before I explain to you what the objector is saying, let me tell you that this verse and the ones that follow are often misunderstood, even among many evangelical Christians
- So to help clear things up, let me ask you a question
 - How would someone object to James’ teaching?
 - For example, would someone try to contradict James by proposing that it’s perfectly OK to have faith but no works?
 - Would anyone ever argue that point?
 - Not in my experience
 - Arguing that faith without works is a perfectly acceptable option for a Christian doesn’t even make sense
- So this wasn’t an argument that James was worried about either
- Instead, James worried about the opposite argument

- He is worried that someone might argue that there is no such thing as a believer who has faith without works
 - Or said another way, James worried that someone might argue that every true believer must produce works
 - And therefore, a faith that produces no work would not be true faith
 - And we have certainly heard many teachers making that claim
 - So James poses that same argument himself in v.18
 - An objector might say, “You say that a man may have have faith by itself, but can that man show me his faith without works? No.”
 - How can you show faith without works? You can’t, since faith itself is invisible
 - A believer can only show faith by works
 - Therefore, a true faith must have works
 - And if a faith has no works, then it is not a true faith
 - So, the objector is suggesting that James is worried about something that he doesn’t need to worry about
 - True faith will always produce works, so why spend time worrying about people who lack works...they aren’t believers in the first place
 - James wanted to raise this question because he knew it was a thought in the church, both then and now
 - And then James makes the counter-argument to dispel it, to challenge it

James 2:19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

- In v.19 James refutes this argument so powerfully that it immediately shuts up anyone who might argue otherwise
 - James makes an example of the demon realm to disprove the objector’s assumption that a sure belief automatically produces behavior consistent with that belief
 - James says do you believe God is one
 - He’s referring to the Jewish Shema, the confessions of the Jews found in Deuteronomy 6:4

Deut. 6:4 “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!

- This statement from Scripture is not a statement of the Gospel
 - James is purposely not using an example of belief in the Gospel, because his point is not about who is saved

- He is arguing a general point about the relationship between any belief and behavior
- So James says that when a person accepts a statement of Scripture to be true, they do well
 - But now James wants the reader to consider whether a strong belief must always result in behavior consistent with that belief?
 - Or is it possible to have a strong belief and yet still act in ways that are inconsistent with that belief?
- To prove his point, James says consider Exhibit A: the demon world
 - Demons are fallen angels
 - They were once in heaven serving the Living God
 - They knew the goodness of God and they understood His power
 - And when Lucifer rebelled against God, a third of the angelic realm rebelled with him
 - And together, these rebellious angels have come under judgment and are appointed a place in the abyss and later the Lake of Fire
 - In the meantime, these fallen angels – or demons we call them – serve Satan as they await their judgment moment
- James points out that these demons also believe that God is One
 - Again, notice that James didn't say that they believe in the Gospel
 - Rather, the demons know that God exists, that He is the only true God
 - They have this knowledge from firsthand experience
 - It doesn't even require faith on their part
 - They have seen Him
 - They know He is real and that He has real power
 - They also know He will be their judge
 - And they know that He will hold them accountable for their sin in rebelling against Him
 - You see proof of their belief and understanding in the Gospels when Jesus encountered a legion of demons

Luke 8:28 Seeing Jesus, he cried out and fell before Him, and said in a loud voice, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me.”

Luke 8:29 For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had seized him many times; and he was bound with chains and shackles and kept under guard, and yet he would break his bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.

Luke 8:30 And Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Legion”; for

many demons had entered him.

Luke 8:31 **They were imploring Him not to command them to go away into the abyss.**

- They immediately recognized Jesus, they knew Him to be Lord
 - They called Him by name
 - And they anticipated that Jesus would cast them into the abyss, into Hell
 - The demons know all these things
 - Their belief is absolutely 100% sure
 - They have no doubt about what their future holds
- And yet James says that belief only produces a shudder
 - A unique word in the New Testament, it means to shiver in fear
 - James is saying that these demons are so certain of their coming judgment, they are shivering in fear
 - And yet that belief in God didn't stop them from rebelling against Him
 - It hasn't brought them to repentance
 - They continue rebelling today
- So to the objector who says that a true faith will always result in works consistent with that faith, James asks you to consider the demons
 - Demons know the same thing you know
 - In a sense, demons have an even better understanding of God than we do
 - And yet they aren't living a life of good works for God
 - So should we assume that a believer's belief in God will always compel him to produce good works?
 - The obvious answer is no. There must be a conscious decision to follow that faith with behavior
- Some might argue that Christians are different than the demons because we have the Spirit
 - And the indwelling of the Holy Spirit ensures we are brought to good works
 - But Scripture never makes that promise
 - It promises us that the Spirit is a deposit and a guarantee of our future inheritance in Christ
 - But Scripture also teaches clearly that the degree of our inheritance is in our control and not assured
 - And if we're not careful, Paul says in Ephesians 4:30 that a believer can grieve the Spirit
 - Others might point to Ephesians 2:10 where Paul says we were created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand so that we would walk in

them

- Is Paul teaching that a believer's good works are inevitable because God has ordained them to happen?
- No, Paul is teaching that the course of our works has been established by God, not the inevitability of us following that course
- God has already decided what works we are to accomplish to please Him
 - So we can't decide for ourselves what works please God
- But the question remains will I serve Him in those works or do other things that please myself instead?
- So James warns that it's possible for a Christian to act, in a sense, like the demons
 - We can know the truth about Jesus, yet we can still find ways to sin against Him and not live a life pleasing to Him
- If we hold the view that true faith always produces works, we risk making two serious doctrinal errors
 - First, this thinking neutralizes the power of James' teaching in Chapter 2
 - Slowly but surely, we begin to let ourselves off the very hook James is trying to set in our hearts
 - Why worry so much about passing tests or serving the needs of our hungry and poor brothers and sisters?
 - What happens to our sense of urgency?
 - Why would we ever need to re-evaluate our lives and question our decisions?
 - Won't we just rest in the confidence that our faith will naturally produce good works for Christ?
 - Like a plane on autopilot, we can take in the scenery knowing that we'll get to our destination one way or another
 - This is exactly the kind of complacency that James is working to end
 - The second problem with this error is even more troubling
 - Making works a necessary demonstration of saving faith moves us perilously close to a Gospel of works
 - Where we suggest to believers that there is something we must do to ensure our salvation
- Fortunately, James makes clear that he is not arguing for such a view by using two Old Testament examples

James 2:20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

James 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

James 2:22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;

James 2:23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,” and he was called the friend of God.

James 2:24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

- First, James uses the story of Abraham sacrificing Isaac on the mountain in Chapter 22 of Genesis
 - James begins again with his thesis, that faith is useless without works
 - Not absent or false or fake, just useless
 - And his use of Abraham as an example is especially important, because Abraham was declared to be righteous by faith at an earlier point in Genesis 15
 - But in Genesis 22 God gave Abraham an opportunity to display His faith through works, so that Abraham might accomplish something important for God’s glory
 - In v.21 James says that Abraham was justified by works when he offered up Isaac
 - As confusing as this verse can be to some Bible students, the proper interpretation is fairly easy
 - It rests on an understanding of the word “justified”
 - The word always means declared righteous, not to make someone righteous
 - In Genesis 15, God declared Abraham to be righteous on the basis of His faith
 - But in Genesis 22, Abraham was declared to be righteous by his works
 - In Genesis 15, it was God’s judgment that Abraham be counted (or reckoned as) righteous
 - But in Genesis 22, it was Abraham’s turn to make that declaration for himself through his own actions
 - And his obedient actions had the effect of declaring the same things that was already true from God’s perspective
 - James is saying that when we do good works, we make a declaration about who we are – our testimony
 - Without faith, it is impossible to please God
 - After faith, it is our obligation to please Him – and we do that through good works
- Finally, James uses another example of saving faith put to work

James 2:25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

James 2:26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without

works is dead.

- Rahab was the prostitute who believed in the testimony of the invading Jews concerning God's plans to destroy her town of Jericho
 - And when Joshua sent spies into the land, she hid them from the Jericho king
- Her kindness to those messengers was a meaningful act of mercy to men she should have seen as enemies
 - And because she acted on her faith, the spies assured her that she would be saved when the city was destroyed
 - She could have remained silent
 - She still would have had belief in the God of Israel
 - But if she hadn't acted on that faith to protect the spies, then she would have lost her earthly life in the invasion
 - James' point is there are benefits for God's glory when we act on our faith and perform works
 - And there are personal benefits when we act on our faith and do the works that our faith requires
 - In Rahab's case, the reward was her life was spared when Israel defeated Jericho
 - And her name was preserved in Scripture in the line of Jesus
 - She was the mother of Boaz, the husband of Ruth
- How kind of James to close on the example of Rahab
 - If he had ended on Abraham, perhaps we would have wondered if this goal was out of reach for us
 - Only men of Abraham's stature could obtain such a testimony
 - But then there is Rahab, a harlot James reminds us
 - If she could act on her faith in a simple way, taking in strangers in her home
 - Perhaps we can do the same then?
 - As James reminds us in v.26...a dead body is a very real thing, but it's entirely useless...don't live a life of very real but very useless faith

- You may remember near the end of James 1, the apostle taught us an important principle for proper Christian living
 - First in v.21 he said we should put aside filthiness and wickedness
 - And receive the word of God, which is able to save our souls...save us in the sense of sanctifying us
 - Saving us from the consequences of our sinful choices
 - And that sanctifying process is a result of receiving the word in humility, hearing the teaching of God's word
 - James goes on to say that if we are merely hearers of the word and not doers of the word, we deceive ourselves into thinking we are religious
 - And then in v.26 James offers a gold standard of sorts for measuring who is truly putting the word into practice
 - If we cannot learn to bridle our tongue, to control it with authority, then our religion is worthless
 - Here again is this idea of worth or value
 - Any life of religion that doesn't arrive at sanctification – a life that is steadily becoming more Christ-like and holy – is of no value or worth
 - Outward religious practice that don't lead to an inward conforming to Christ in our lives won't profit God, our neighbors nor ourself
- Moving to Chapter 3 today, we come back to this theme
 - At the end of Chapter 2, James finished with a reminder that our life goal must be to declare our faith publicly by doing the works that faith requires
 - Works are anything that display our faith, whether an action or a word or even a thought
 - And for James, the words we use are a particularly good indicator of our maturity in the faith
 - So he spends Chapter 3 focused on speech and its relationship to spiritual maturity

James 3:1 Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.

James 3:2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

- James' opening verses set the tone for the chapter
 - James begins with a warning
 - Let not many of you become teachers, because teachers incur a stricter judgment, and we all stumble in many ways.
 - The sense in Greek is “Do not press yourself into the role of teacher”
 - Don't presume to speak on behalf of the Lord concerning His word

- Don't seek this role, because we are all prone to sinning and stumbling
 - And therefore don't place yourself in the position of possibly sinning with your speech while teaching
 - Because teachers will incur a stricter judgment
- Failing to handle the word of God properly is a particularly damaging sin for a Christian
 - Teachers who sin through poor teaching stand to receive an even harsher judgment when they face Christ
 - They will be graded by tougher standards
- In v.2 James is going to quickly broaden the discussion beyond teachers, because he's really aiming for a general point on sinning with our speech
 - But before we go there with him, let's give a moment's thought to how we apply the statement in v.1
 - Is James trying to discourage us from teaching God's word?
 - In a way yes, but not so that we wouldn't have teachers, but so that we have teachers gifted and called by God
 - First, we need to remember that James is Jewish and he's writing to a Jewish audience
 - And in Jewish culture, a teacher was an important authority figure
 - They called teachers rabbi, and it was a term of authority and power
 - So James is speaking about leaders in the church who express their leadership through a teaching role of one kind or another
 - And by teaching, we mean establishing the normative interpretation of Scripture for a body of believers
 - Today, we might call these people pastors, teaching pastors, Bible study leaders, etc.
 - And this would also include women who teach under the authority of pastors or elders and interpret Scripture
 - These are the roles that should particularly heed this warning
 - The warning says don't press yourself into one of these roles
 - Don't even make holding a leadership role in teaching a goal unless you are specifically gifted and called to that role
 - Teaching without the spiritual gift means working outside your gift, and it is not a work of the Spirit
 - And we are placing ourselves in jeopardy come judgment day
 - Because when we inevitably mishandle God's word in the course of teaching, we have deceived ourselves and others concerning God's word
 - Our mistake is magnified by being multiplied in the hearts and minds of

our students

- What about the person who doesn't feel they have the gift to teach, but they feel led to conduct a Bible study group or lead a Sunday school class?
 - In light of James' teaching, we can safely conclude that someone absent a teaching gift could lead a Bible study or class
 - So long as that leader does not take it upon himself to interpret Scripture for the class
 - Rather, the leader would present teaching from an approved curriculum or teacher who is clearly gifted to interpret God's word
 - That leader will still be accountable for what he says and does, as are all Christians
 - But the stricter judgment James mentions wouldn't be a concern, since the person isn't endeavoring to interpret Scripture
 - Finally, all Christians are given the ability by the Spirit to read and understand Scripture to a certain extent
 - I am not proposing that only certain people can read and interpret Scripture for us
 - This was the heresy perpetuated by Rome prior to the Reformation
 - We are a kingdom of priests, and all believers have equal access to the Spirit and to the opportunity to know and understand God's word
 - But there is a difference in God's economy between knowing something for ourselves and endeavoring to teach Scripture to others
 - The Spirit may reveal some aspect of Scripture to us – just what He feels we need – while not giving us a complete enough picture to carry that message to others
- As I mentioned already, James quickly broadens his point beyond teachers
 - James is really talking about self-control
 - Because the most important work we can do in faith is the work of conforming our behavior to the commandments of Scripture
 - And James returns to his Chapter 1 theme telling us that the best test of our spiritual maturity is found in how well we control ourselves, particularly our tongue
 - If we can reach a point in our Christian walk where we are self-controlled in our speech, we will have become spiritually mature
 - That's what James means by "perfect" – the word is *teleios* which literally means having reached an end, or being complete
 - This is a Biblical principle
 - Our degree of spiritual maturity shows itself most readily in our speech patterns
 - If our speech is godly and pleasing to the Lord in all respects, we may fairly judge ourselves to be maturing in our walk of faith
 - But this is a tough standard

- It addresses lying, gossiping, boasting, slandering, cursing, and a whole host of other tendencies
- And until we've put all those aside entirely, we still have work to do
- That's why James gives a warning to those who might wish to teach
 - Because if we're not a mature believer with a Spiritual gift to teach, we're likely to see our teaching become laced with one or another of these sins
 - And then comes a stricter judgment because our sin is infecting our students
- Now to the one who may doubt the relationship between the tongue and the rest of our spiritual maturity, James gives several analogies or examples to support his thesis
 - First, James establishes that a small thing can have great power

James 3:3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well.

James 3:4 Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires.

James 3:5 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!

- Both examples are simple and illustrate James' point beautifully
 - First, a horse is a large animal but a trained rider can make it do anything merely by controlling the bit in his mouth
 - When you think about it, that's really quite remarkable
 - And the principle here is equally amazing
 - When we finally learn to yield to the Spirit's controlling influence in our speech, then we will have also yielded in other areas of our life and actions
- It's as if James is saying that the last thing we tend to give over to the Spirit is our speech
 - Perhaps because it's so closely connected to our thinking and motivations
 - As Jesus observed:

Matt. 15:18 “But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.

Matt. 15:19 “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

- So if we are the horse, then the Holy Spirit is the rider
 - And once we give Him control over our tongue, He will be free to direct our whole body into a Christ-like life

- And then the second example extends from the first
 - A ship faces many challenges and trials on the open water
 - But as long as the captain has control of the rudder – a very small part of that vessel – he can guide the ship safely through the strong winds
 - But there is an obvious corollary to this rule
 - If the captain doesn't control the rudder, those strong winds will eventually result in shipwreck
 - Obviously, we are the ship and the rudder is our tongue again
 - If our captain gains control of our tongue, he has the opportunity to guide us safely through difficult times
 - But if our rudder remains outside the Spirit's control, we face spiritual shipwreck
 - Paul alludes to an example of just such a situation in his first letter to Timothy

1Tim. 1:18 This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight,

1Tim. 1:19 keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.

1Tim. 1:20 Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.

- Hymenaeus and Alexander couldn't discipline their tongues and maintain a good conscience (meaning a good testimony)
 - So the Lord brought discipline through Paul, and their faith was shipwrecked, meaning their faith didn't profit them
- So in v.5 James summarizes
 - The tongue is a small part of the body, but it can boast or lay claim to great power in our lives
 - But unfortunately, not only does it have great saving power in our walk with Christ
 - But James turns to the negative and reminds us that it also has the power to condemn
 - He uses a third analogy to emphasize the negative side
 - A small flame can burn down a forest
 - And that leads James to his second point: as small as the tongue is, man is not capable of controlling it by himself

James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set

among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.

James 3:7 For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race.

James 3:8 But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.

- Our tongues represent the very world of sin, of hell itself
 - In the sense of the sin and evil that a tongue can ignite in ourselves and in others
 - And in v.6 James says that our sinful speech defiles the entire body
 - And like a rudder, it can set our life on a course of evil
 - Notice at the end of v.6 James says that a tongue can set our life on a course that is set on fire by hell
 - James is saying essentially the same thing Peter says in:

1Pet. 5:8 Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

- The devil (or hell) can set our life on “fire” in the sense that he can set us on a course that brings our lives to a disastrous end
 - James isn’t suggesting a Christian who can’t tame their tongue will end up in hell
 - No amount of sinning can erase the grace of the New Covenant
- But he is saying that we will see the Enemy taking advantage of our weakness and drive our Christian witness and testimony into oblivion
 - Leaving us with nothing at our judgment
- The problem of our tongue can’t be corrected by men’s own efforts
 - The answers aren’t found in self-help books
 - They are found in the God-help book, the Bible
 - Only God’s word with the Spirit can bring about spiritual maturity and the taming of our flesh, including of our tongue
 - And James makes clear that men don’t have the power to handle this alone
 - James mentions four categories of animals that have been tamed or subdued by man
 - These four categories are noteworthy because they match the four categories in Genesis 1
 - Beast, birds, creeping things and sea creatures
 - The third word is *herpeton*, from the word *herpo* in Greek which means to creep

- So James is intentionally referencing the four categories of the animal kingdom God created and gave to man to subdue
 - And just as God commanded Adam, man has indeed subdued these creatures
 - We have invented many ways to bring them under our control to a certain degree
 - There are limits of course
 - My family can't seem to control our poodle
- But the tongue is not something man can control in that way
 - We can't subdue it in any way comparable to the way we control animals
 - We may wish to control it, but sooner or later it re-exerts itself and we see our weakness
 - James says the tongue is unruly evil, meaning un-restrainable evil
 - James' point is that God gave us the power to subdue animals, but the power to restrain sin in our bodies comes only through the Spirit and God's word
 - We must recognize this is a problem we don't solve without Him guiding us
 - And the good works of faith begin with receiving God's word in humility (i.e., James 1:21)
 - And then being doers of the word by seeking to conform our lives to what we learn, yielding to the Spirit as He takes authority over our lives
- Finally, James challenges us to not be content with an untamed tongue

James 3:9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God;

James 3:10 from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.

James 3:11 Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?

James 3:12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.

- As those who claim faith in Christ and desire to serve Him and witness about Him to others...
 - At one moment we bless His name with our tongues, and at another moment we curse men who are made in His image
 - Cursing doesn't just mean curse words, but any expression of hatred or condemnation made against someone
 - We're talking about all hateful or ungodly speech
 - It's back to the principle from James 2:10
 - If you violate one law, you violate them all

- And though we bless the Lord in one moment, we are effectively cursing Him when we curse the men He made in His own image
 - You can't have it both ways, and yet we do it all the time
 - As James says in v.10, these things ought not be this way
- James uses a classic comparison that Jesus Himself makes in the Gospels
 - A fountain of water wouldn't be expected to produce both good and bad water
 - Or a plant can't produce fruit other than the kind intended
 - And as new creatures in Christ, we were born again by the Spirit so that we might bear fruit and glory to God
 - And when we allow our tongue to remain untamed, we are failing to live up to that eternal purpose
 - Our very reason for being saved is unmet in God's view so long as our tongue – and the rest of our body – remains outside the Spirit's control
 - We will one day bring forth fresh water, and then the next day we bring forth salt water
 - And in that way, we fail to bring our Lord glory
 - Sometimes the oldest advice is the best, as our mothers said: if we can't say something nice, don't say something at all...like James said in 1:19

James 1:19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;

- James' letter moves forward today into a discussion of wisdom
 - And as we begin, let's be clear how James moves from his earlier discussion of self-control over our tongue to a discussion of wisdom
 - The transition is really quite simple
 - First, remember that James is a letter about showing our faith through works in the face of tests or trials
 - And then remember that James 3 begins with a discussion of gaining control over ungodly speech
 - And now look at v.113

James 3:13 Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.

- James moves his focus to those in the Church who try to show their “wisdom” and spiritual maturity simply with impressive words
 - Talking the talk but not walking the walk
 - Demonstrating wisdom through impressive oratory was the common style for both Greek and Jewish “wise” men
 - They equated wisdom with the ability to pontificate on weighty matters for hours on end
 - Or to engage in rhetorical arguments and debate with great skill
 - Or twist the meaning of words and turn them to their advantage

Like the story of an old miser who had no friends except his doctor, his pastor and his lawyer. Just before he died he asked these men to gather around him at his bedside.

"I have always heard that you can't take it with you. But I want to disprove that theory," he said. "I have \$90,000 under my mattress, and when I die, just before they throw the dirt on me at my burial, I want you each to toss in an envelope with \$30,000 into my grave."

The three attended the funeral and each threw his envelope in the grave. On the way back from the cemetery, the pastor said, "I must confess. I needed \$10,000 for my new church, so I only threw in \$20,000."

The doctor then said, "I must confess too. I needed \$20,000 for a new hospital I was opening up, so I only threw in \$10,000." The lawyer looked at them both and shook his head. He then said, "Gentlemen, I'm surprised, shocked, and

ashamed of you. I don't see how you could dare to go against that man's final wish. I'll have you know I threw in my personal check for the full amount!"

- So James asks the church who among you is wise and understanding?
 - Remember how James began the chapter?
 - He said we shouldn't press ourselves into a teaching role
 - Because then we risk a harsh judgment if our tongue convicts us in the course of leading and teaching wrongly
 - A teacher's role is ultimately one of conveying godly wisdom through words, and then backing up those words through godly living
 - And we must be able to live up to both standards
 - What we say must be godly and how we live it out must be equally godly
 - The Greek words for wise and understanding are important to understanding James' gist here
 - The word for wise means to have moral insight, or to discern issues of moral conduct
 - To know right from wrong and make judgments about what God considers proper
 - Understanding means having an expertise in something, like an intellectual
 - So to reward the opening of v.13, James is asking, "You think you can be a teacher or leader and speak for what God says concerning right and wrong? You think you're an expert in righteousness and godliness?"
 - And then to this question, James provides the challenge
 - James says, then show your wisdom and understanding through your good behavior in deeds done in humility
- Did you see the two parts to James' command?
 - First, you don't practice wisdom and understanding through words alone
 - You can't just talk the talk...you must walk the walk
 - It's the same theme again: wisdom (like faith) isn't a concept, it's a way of life and it requires action
 - The Jewish Christians were still trapped in the Pharisaical pattern of giving others the lectures on holiness but without practicing it themselves

Matt. 23:1 Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, Matt. 23:2 saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; Matt. 23:3 therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.

- So James says talking about matters of righteousness and godliness isn't the same as being godly or righteous
 - If we think we're wise in these matters but we can't bring ourselves to actually live righteousness in good deeds and behaviors, then we're fooling ourselves
 - Just like the Pharisees did
- Then secondly, James' commandment requires that we perform these deeds in gentleness of wisdom
 - The term in Greek means humility with a sense of submitting to God, Who is the source of all godly wisdom
 - Here again, true godly wisdom lived out is never prideful or arrogant or self-serving or rude or critical
 - It is gentle and loving and humble, reflecting the fact that our godliness was not a product of ourselves
 - We didn't figure anything out or create anything ourselves
 - We arrived at our station in life by God's grace
 - We are saved by God's grace and sanctified by His grace
 - And in obedience we submit to His Spirit and demonstrate wisdom through submission to His will
 - This opening verse sets the positive example for wisdom, and James uses the rest of the chapter to explore the opposite problem

James 3:14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.

James 3:15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.

James 3:16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

James 3:17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

James 3:18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

- Apparently, some leadership in the early Jewish church had been seeking for teaching or leadership positions out of selfish ambition
 - Of course, this kind of thing never happens in the church today (irony)
 - And when people seek for leadership or teaching positions out of selfish ambition, they inevitably become competitors in a race for recognition
 - And this leads to bitter jealousies and allegiances and various kinds of evil
 - James alludes to exactly this kind of rancor and disunity

- He says in v.14 they are acting and speaking arrogantly
 - Lying against the truth
- Arrogance is the inevitable result of selfish ambition and jealousies
 - We can easily imagine various men and perhaps even women seeking for positions in the church leadership
 - Biblical leadership always includes the expectation that leaders are also teachers of God's word (Titus 1:9; 1 Timothy 3:2)
- So these ambitious people began to compete with one another for who was the most wise in their knowledge of Scripture
 - They engaged in rhetorical debates, probably concerning the Law or prophecies concerning Jesus
 - Remember they didn't have any New Testament Scripture yet
- Then as one might gain an advantage over another, bitter jealousies developed
 - Men harbored anger and hatred against one another
 - Factions and camps resulted, one against another, each supporting their own leadership candidate or teacher
- As James says, this resulted in disorder within the body, and led to every evil thing
 - And the source for this degeneration within the church began with ungodly speech, driven by selfish ambition and arrogance
 - And it leads eventually to the disintegration of the Body
- James points out that this kind of wisdom is not from above
 - He uses the word wisdom in an ironic sense, because clearly it's not wise thinking
 - It's a kind of thinking that has a demonic source
 - James isn't suggesting that we are supposed to blame Satan directly for all these behaviors
 - It's not "The Devil made me do it"
 - But this kind of discord and evil traces back to the sin of Satan in the Throne Room and flows through the sin of Adam in the Garden to us today
 - We are acting in a way that finds its origins in the sin of Satan's pride
 - So when we say we want to serve God through a teaching role and then seek that role out of selfish ambition and arrogance, we aren't acting in a godly way
 - We're actually acting in a satanic way, in that we are acting in sin
 - And we lie against the truth
 - James says "the truth" here, which refers to the Gospel itself
 - How do we "lie" against the Gospel when we act this way?
 - It's because we may be speaking the truth of the Gospel with our mouths
 - But by our sinful arrogance and selfishness, we tear down the Gospel by our

actions

- We are talking the talk, but we're not walking the walk
- And unbelievers who watch us aren't dumb
 - They hear our words and then watch our sinful actions and they make the obvious conclusion
 - They may fail to believe our message because our actions declare it to be a lie
- James says true godly wisdom comes from above and yields a different set of behaviors
 - First it is pure – uncontaminated by fleshly, sinful desires and ambitions
 - If we feel a calling to teach God's people and lead in that capacity, we can know it is a godly calling by testing our ambitions
 - Are we as excited to teach a class of three as we are a class of three hundred?
 - Are we fulfilled by understanding God's truth accurately and sharing it with one person or do we need a large crowd?
 - Do we feel jealousy when another teacher finds something in Scripture we didn't find ourselves? Are we ever tempted to claim another's teaching as our own?
 - Can we change our mind about what we believe when God brings us a better interpretation through another teacher? Do we have a teachable heart even as we strive to teach others?
 - Godly wisdom from above will always come with a purity of spirit that removes our personal ambition and makes God's glory and His word the focus entirely
 - Following from our pure motive, James says in v.17 that we will speak in a peaceable, gentle, reasonable way
 - Our speech as we teach should not be pushy, arrogant, entrenched, defensive, angry or confrontational
 - Rather it will be full of mercy and good fruits
 - A teacher who speaks with the wisdom from above speaks from a perspective of God's mercy and grace
 - And the fruit of his teaching will be the ultimate measure of where his wisdom originates
 - Look first at the life of a teacher, to see if his wisdom has led to a godly life in his own walk
 - Is the teacher the kind of man he calls others to be based on Scripture?
 - Is his home life a godly peaceful home? Are his children respectful and obedient?
 - The Bible gives us these tests because they tell us whether a man's teaching is rooted in wisdom given from above or a false wisdom that originates from a selfish fleshly source
 - I've met many people who aspire to teach the Bible and want their time in the

spotlight

- And in many cases they have a strong knowledge of Scripture
- But they aren't operating in the Spirit and they display a kind of prideful, ambitiousness that speaks louder than their words
 - And it's reflected in their personal life and personality
- And then James says look at the fruit of a teacher's ministry as a whole
 - When they teach, are lives changed, men and women brought to faith, families and marriages restored, hearts strengthened to serve the Lord?
 - Or does the teacher bring discord, factions, disputes, or ambivalence?
- Finally, James says a teacher operating with wisdom from above will remain unwavering in the presentation of the truth
 - Unwavering refers to teaching without prejudice or partiality
 - The teacher doesn't waver in his presentation of the truth simply because his audience is different and may not like what Scripture says in some sense
 - Unwavering is different than being unteachable
 - I can be unwavering and yet remain teachable so long as my changing views are informed from Scripture and not an external viewpoint or trend or fad
 - And so long as my motive remains speaking truth and not pleasing my audience or my own pride
 - It takes a strong mature Christian to admit they have been wrong in understanding areas of Scripture they previously felt was settled fact
 - It also requires a strong mature teacher to present the honest truth in the face of a hostile audience
 - Especially if that teacher looks to that audience for their financial support as pastor, for example
 - A teacher can't seek to be approved by the world or the carnal members of his audience, otherwise he will begin to waiver
- This idea bridges James into the first part of Chapter 4, where James raises a concern over how our faith is tested by our temptation to seek the world's acceptance

James 4:1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?

James 4:2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.

James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

- The members of the church were quarreling, and James asks why? What's the source of

this conflict?

- It isn't from God and it isn't a proper or natural product of faith
- The source, James says, is our flesh, or more specifically our fleshly desire for worldly pleasures
 - The source for the quarreling is their sinful flesh
 - I find this principle to be 100% true in my own experience
 - As I have been invited into different groups or churches from time to time, and I am exposed to church quarrels
 - I can always trace the discord to fleshly sinful desires to gain something that the world values
 - Instead, he describes a general pattern of worsening behavior
- First, James says we lust
 - The word lust means sinful cravings
 - It might be a craving for attention or fame
 - Or for wealth
 - Or for power or control
 - We already learned how a Jewish teacher or rabbi would likely receive all these things as a result of holding a teaching position
 - So the problems began when people lusted for the earthly, worldly rewards that attached to these roles
 - Rather than seeking the heavenly rewards that God alone appoints to someone who desires to serve Him
 - And this lust then leads to "murder"
 - In extreme cases, this is literally true, but that's not likely to be James' meaning here
 - He's speaking of murder in the same way Jesus did when he said if you harbor hatred in your heart, you have committed a sin equivalent to murder (Matthew 5:21-22)
 - The lustful desire leads to a sinful thought against others who stand in the way of us obtaining what we want
 - This is exactly the kind of quarreling James alluded to back in Chapter 3, and he repeats it in v.2
- Then James says they do not have these things they want because they do not ask
 - In the context of James' teaching overall, it's clear what they wanted
 - At least in part, they wanted to be in a teaching or leadership role or they had some other ambition or desire that had developed from a lust

- And James says they hadn't asked, meaning they hadn't prayed to God and asked Him to grant them this thing
 - In Greek, the verb tense is a continuous action of not asking
 - They are continually not asking God, but rather they are always taking matters into their own hands
 - So a desire or lust begins a series of downward steps into sinful thoughts and actions...all done in an effort to gain something in their own power rather than asking God
- But even when some do resort to prayer, they ask and don't receive because they ask with wrong motives
 - The Greek word for "wrong motives" means "in evil"
 - And their motive is to spend what they receive on pleasures
 - This phrase is the same phrase used to describe the Prodigal son's behavior when he wasted his fortune on debauchery
 - James isn't speaking simply of spending in the sense of spending money, but more generally of wasting God's provision on satisfying our flesh
 - Who could expect God to honor such a request if He knows we are only going to use His gift to satisfy our evil desires?
- James isn't teaching on how to pray in such a way to get what we want
 - I say this because many come to these verses of James, quote them out of context, and then use them to make some point about how we are to pray if we are to receive what we want
 - While there is a mini lesson to be found here on the issue of prayer, it is only the one James himself is offering
 - That is, when we ask for something with an evil desire or motive, expect God to say no
 - That's all we can conclude about prayer from these verses
 - We can't take that truth and turn it backwards in an attempt to create a second principle
 - Specifically, we can't say that when we ask with sincere motives, we are guaranteed that God will give us what we want
 - It doesn't work that way
 - We still might not get what we ask for even if we ask with perfect motives
 - False teachers try to use this verse to explain why we don't get what we want when we pray (i.e., "You must not have asked with enough faith or the right motives, etc.")
 - Instead of moving into a treatise on prayer, James is interested in addressing the larger problem in the church – seeking after worldly desires

James 4:4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is

hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

James 4:5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us”?

- James draws his lesson from the Old Testament principle that God is a jealous God
 - And we are either friends with God or we are friends with the world
 - We can't seek after what the world values while at the same time leading a life that pleases the Lord
 - They are mutually incompatible
 - In fact they are so incompatible, if we try to have a good relationship with the world, we are cheating on our relationship with God
 - We are adulterers
 - This is the principle of the Old Testament as it described Israel's disobedience to God's commandments
 - Israel was an adulteress to God
 - And now James says individual believers repeat this mistake as they “cheat” on God in pursuing worldly lusts
 - James says it powerfully in v.4: whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God
- How sad it is that James' counsel to the first century church is so relevant today
 - How many churches are in turmoil because people are repeating these same errors
 - Seeking to display their godly wisdom through speech rather than through actions
 - Relying on an earthly source for their thinking and displaying a life of sin built upon the world's wisdom
 - Giving in to their fleshly lusts and seeking after worldly pleasures, even to the point of asking God for opportunities or blessing simply to feed their fleshly desires
 - Quarreling with one another, hating one another
 - And through all of this, lying against the truth
 - I so hope that James' letter will cause each of us to reflect on our own motives and behaviors so that we might present a better witness

- Sometimes our life problems are complicated and difficult to understand
 - But sometimes our problems aren't as complicated as we assume

One evening, I went with my parents to a fancy restaurant. Dad was about halfway through his meal when he took a hard look at the potato, called the waitress over and said, "This potato is bad!"

To my utter amazement, the waitress at this "5-Star" place picked the potato up, smacked it, put it back on the plate, and then told my Dad, "If that potato causes any more trouble, just let me know."

- James gives us an equally shocking answer to the question why do quarrels exist in the church
 - He says it's simple, really
 - The source of quarrels is lustful flesh that desires to have what the world wants
 - And when we don't get what we want, we fight with each other rather than ask God
 - And we're disappointed when we do ask but still don't get what we want because we ask with worldly motives
 - But James says we can't seek to be friends with the world, to be like them and to want what they want
 - Because God won't share us with the world, so He won't let us have satisfaction in those pursuits
 - Our Father knows what's best for us and won't give in when we ask 50 times
- So when our requests go ignored and our fellowship in the Body of Christ is unsatisfying, we need to examine our lives to see if this pattern is responsible
- Now James turns to exhorting us to a better path, the path that grace makes possible
 - In v.5, which we read last week, James says that God demands perfect allegiance and devotion from His people
 - How do we meet such a demanding standard?
 - Are we ever perfectly devoted to anyone or anything?
 - Fortunately, James makes clear that our opportunity to remain devoted to God is a problem God Himself is ready to solve on our behalf

James 4:6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."

James 4:7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

James 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

James 4:9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom.

James 4:10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

- James says God gives a “greater grace”
 - God’s grace is greater than our failures to remain devoted to Him
 - When the world begins to pull us away and entice us with one thing or another
 - God’s grace to strengthen us in the face of these trials is sufficient to bring us through
 - James explains how this works in v.6-10
 - God follows a simple but powerful principle
 - He frustrates the proud but gives His greater grace to the humble
 - If we resist His will, He will bring our resistance to futility
 - But when we recognize we are weak and powerless, God steps in to strengthen us and direct us to better choices in His grace
 - We either push against him or we lean on Him

At Heather’s house in Dallas one day, a hummingbird flew into their garage. The door was open, but the bird was stuck in that gap between the door and the ceiling. It kept flying higher bumping around, unable to see the gap by the door to get out.

An hour went by and they were unable to shoo the bird out. Heather remarked “If only the bird could figure out that in order to go up it needs to go down first” to which her husband responded “It’s just like Philippians 2”

- Like Philippians 2:

Phil. 2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

Phil. 2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

Phil. 2:7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

Phil. 2:8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Phil. 2:9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,

- We are to follow Christ’s example...lowering ourselves in our own eyes
 - And accepting that God’s way is better than our own

- And James says the first step is to submit to God
 - Submission is the starting point
 - Submission is a heart attitude that leads to obedience, an action
 - Failing to submit is the same as seeking after the world
 - We aren't agreeing with God's priorities and standards and desires
 - We aren't submitting to His decrees
 - But when we set aside what the world gives us as priorities, we take the first step toward submission to God
 - We set aside personal ambitions
 - And we make God's ambitions our ambitions
 - In my own life it seems the issue is mostly one of time
 - I make myself God's enemy when I set His will aside and pursue my own agenda
 - But I demonstrate submission when I give my time to those things God wants me to pursue...when I follow His will
- Where do we find God's will?
 - First and foremost, we find it in His word
 - When we read His word and heed it, we take the first step to submission
 - I think finding God's will in His word is the context for the rest of v.7
 - Think about how the enemy works to undermine the lives of Christians
 - He distorts and twists God's word to cause us to doubt or disregard God's word
 - He brings us to a point where we are willing to set aside God's decrees and pursue the world's decrees instead
 - Just as in the Garden when he brought Woman to a point of doubting God's word
 - So the key is our focus on God's word, which is the manifestation of His will for His children
 - James says resist the devil and he will flee
 - Resist is *anthistemi* which means take a stand against
 - Take a stand against the devil's schemes by taking a stand against the worldly sources of wisdom
 - Take a stand by remaining in God's word and seeking truth there
 - Take a stand against the enemy by knowing and following God's decrees and resisting any temptation to follow the world
 - Taking this stand against the enemy is a step of preparation, not a strategy for battle
 - Armies don't prepare and train for combat while they are engaged with the

enemy

- They train before the battle, working against one another in friendly combat
- They study and practice their drills and review their orders so they will be ready for the day of combat
- Christians don't prepare for battles with the enemy by waiting until they are in a moment of combat
 - We study our Bible, we practice righteousness, and we encourage each other for the day of combat
- Then when we face the enemy well-prepared to resist him, James says he will flee such preparation
 - Paul says the same thing in Ephesians 6:

Eph. 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

Eph. 6:11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

Eph. 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Eph. 6:13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

- So James says quarrels in the body will end when we seek God's grace to overcome our wandering hearts
 - First we humble ourselves
 - Then we submit to God's will
 - Third, we take a stand against the enemy and his efforts to pull us back from following God's will and into the world's desires
 - Fourth, we draw near to God
 - The term "draw near to God" is a Jewish phrase which means enter into worship
 - It comes from Leviticus where the nation of Israel is called to worship the Living God
 - We need to engage in regular, continual worship of God, drawing near to Him in corporate and personal worship
 - James isn't talking about a place or an event necessarily
 - He isn't saying, "Make sure you go to church on Sunday," though that wouldn't be a wrong way to implement this command
 - Worship is drawing near to God in our daily lives

- We certainly want to join together periodically to allow for an outward expression of worship
 - But never confuse this 90 minute event with worshipping God
- Our weekly event is actually a training event that prepares us for the battles of our daily life, where we truly worship God
 - The worship that takes place outside the building is much more significant than the event inside
- When James says draw nearer to God, he's talking about establishing a daily pattern of worship similar to Romans 12:1-2

Rom. 12:1 **Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.**

Rom. 12:2 **And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.**

- Draw near to God means patterning your life in a worshipful way, so that everything you do is an outward sign of worship
 - Paul said this style of living will be the opposite of conforming to this world – just like James
 - And he said it happens when we renew our minds so that we demonstrate the will of God
- So Paul gives the same pattern that James is giving
 - Conform to God's will, which we come to know as we learn His word, and this enables us to enter into a life of worship
- James gives examples of this lifestyle in v.8-10
 - People who draw near to God cleanse their hands, purify their hearts
 - This is another Levitical phrase that means put aside both outward sinful acts and inward sinful thoughts
 - Don't be double-minded, hypocritical
 - Don't accept in yourselves the pattern of saying one thing and doing something else
 - Rather, be sad and mournful over sins
 - "Miserable" in Greek means in distress
 - Don't be happy or ambivalent over sin...mourn over it, be distressed over it
 - And let the laughter or gaiety associated with worldly sinful living turn into repentant sorrow
 - Don't think that James is saying that sinners have fun and Christians are

miserable

- He is talking about a heart attitude that takes pleasure in the world, taking joy in sin
 - Which is enmity with God
 - Instead of mourning over sin the way God does
 - It's a complete reversal of our fleshly priorities and perspective
- Do these things, James says, and we will humble ourselves before God and He will exalt us
- You may not have noticed, but James has been teaching how to fulfill the first commandment of the Royal Law
 - Remember James is teaching how to live out our faith in actions rather than merely in words alone
 - And in Chapter 2 James says we are to speak and act as those who will be judged by the Royal Law
 - That's the Law that Jesus gave for the New Testament believer
 - Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength
 - Love your neighbor as you love yourself
 - And in Chapter 4, James says to these churches that they live in quarrels and disputes because they weren't living according to the law of their faith
 - They weren't loving God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength
 - And up to this point in the chapter, James has been describing how to live according to that first command
 - Now he turns to the second half of the law, the command to love our neighbors differently than the world does

James 4:11 Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it.

James 4:12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?

- As before, the secret begins in speech
 - In this case, it's how we speak about our brothers and sisters in the faith
 - James is probably referencing back to the quarrels that started when members of the church competed for positions of authority or other privileges
 - James says don't speak against your brother
 - In Greek the phrase literally means "to speak down against"
 - The same Greek word is translated as "slander" in 1 Peter 2:12

- Don't put someone down in your speech, say bad things about a fellow Christian
 - James isn't prohibiting legitimate criticism, as when applying church discipline or holding a brother accountable
 - The Bible gives us clear guidance for how to address misbehavior in the body and deal with it privately and publicly
 - We're talking about speaking negatively about a brother simply because we don't like something about them
 - Because we're disputing with them over something
 - When we speak in an unflattering way against a fellow Christian we do three sinful things:
 - First, we judge our brother or sister
 - A hateful or negative statement about others in the faith are forms of judgment against another
 - Secondly, our speech itself is a violation of the Royal Law
 - It goes "against the law," which means that our harmful speech violates the law
 - The Law requires that we treat others with the love we show ourselves
 - Literally, we break the very law we are accusing another brother or sister of violating
 - We don't accuse ourselves of violating the Law, so neither should we speak badly about others in the faith
 - Finally, we place ourselves above the law, as a judge
 - We pretend the rules don't apply to us
 - This is the sin of hypocrisy
 - Of course, James sets the record straight in v.12
 - There is only One God, and we're not Him
 - And we please Him when we keep His Law rather than making ourselves a law of our own
 - Finally, James ends his letter by giving two warnings to his Jewish readers
 - The rest of Chapter 4 is his warning to the Jewish believer, the Jewish Christian
 - The opening of Chapter 5 gives a different warning to the Jewish unbeliever

James 4:13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit."

James 4:14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

James 4:15 Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."

James 4:16 **But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.**

James 4:17 **Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.**

- First, notice that both warnings begin with the phrase “Come now...”
 - To the believer, James speaks about living ignorant of God’s will
 - But notice that the beginning of this sin is again a form of speech
 - We “tell” ourselves something in the sense that we decide what we will do without consulting God’s will
 - The problem here isn’t that we make plans
 - Planning isn’t the problem
 - God is a God of order and planning is a necessary discipline to lead an orderly and productive life
 - In Genesis God gave Joseph a detailed plan covering 14 years, in his dream about the lean and fat cows
 - The issue is where we go for our plans
 - The man in v.13 is saying what he wants to do
 - And he presumptuously decides what that plan will be without considering God’s will first
 - When we live this way, we aren’t living by faith in God’s word and will
 - We have set those things aside and we’re living in our flesh
 - We are making assumptions about what tomorrow holds and we aren’t leaning on God
 - We’re back to acting proudly rather than humbling ourselves
 - In fact in v.16 James describes this lifestyle as arrogance and boasting
 - It’s a kind of proud living
- We’ve stupidly forgotten just how short life is, and how quickly it can end
 - Like a vapor, which means the fog of our breath in cold air
 - In other words, when we begin to plan a life without God’s input, we are pretending we can direct our own future
 - But God has numbered our days already, according to Job 14:5
- James gives us a different plan
 - He says we should say “If the Lord wills...”
 - Now let’s be clear what James expects
 - First, notice that the process begins again with speech
 - Our sin is often tied to speech and so is our obedience

- But sin doesn't end with speech
 - Our tongue is the rudder that then directs the entire ship into the rocks
 - Likewise, godly speech is the means to a godly outcome, it's not the end in itself
- So James isn't expecting us to go around saying "if God wills" but then failing to actually live that way
 - I meet many Christians who use this phrase but I wonder how often they actually live their lives according to the principle
 - Do we consult God's will before we make plans
 - Or do we announce our own plans, and then casually add "if God wills"?
- Consider the wisdom of James
 - Seek God's will
 - Don't follow worldly wisdom or desires
 - Prepare for the distractions and schemes of the enemy by studying God's word
 - Chart a course in life based upon the will He reveals to you
 - Humble yourself
 - Pursue a life that worships God everyday
 - Don't sin against your brother
- Sound advice

- As we ended Chapter 4 last week, I read the final verse but I didn't take time to teach from it
 - James ended his fourth chapter by saying:

James 4:17 Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

- James counseled that we shouldn't arrogantly declare our plans without consulting God first
 - If we aren't in the habit of asking God for His counsel before we make our plans, we're flying blind
 - We're forgetting that we have a very short time on Earth, and that time will come to an end as God determines
 - And when the plans of our life are made independently of God's will, we are acting in an arrogant and boastful way
 - Remember, the issue for James in this chapter was the problem with living in an independent prideful way
 - Seeking worldly gain, setting our priorities according to worldly values
 - And then quarreling with others when our worldly pursuits are frustrated by God
- So James says we should acknowledge God's sovereign will and set our plans according to that will
 - Seeking to conform our lives to Him in humble obedience
- This leads us to v.17
 - Clearly, it's a sin to live our lives without consulting God's will
 - But in v.17 James now says it's also a sin when we consult God's will but fail to follow it
 - To the one who knows the right thing to do
 - The right thing is the thing that God is directing
 - When we learn God's will as we see it revealed in His word or in our prayer life, but then we dismiss it in favor of our own desires, we sin
 - It's a sin of omission
 - We fail to do what God expects
 - Even if we do nothing, we're sinning because we didn't do the right thing
 - I think of the young rich ruler who asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life
 - After some discussion, Jesus ends the discussion by testing the man's heart with a command to sell everything and follow Him
 - The ruler responds by doing nothing...he just walks away

- For this man, to know the right thing but not do it was sin
- Now into Chapter 5, we see the second of two warnings
 - Last week we saw the first warning addressed to the believers in these Jewish churches
 - Both warnings begin with the phrase “come now...”
 - And both deal with the pride of life, the arrogance of living apart from God’s will
 - In the first warning, the believer was at risk of offending God through a life of sin that either avoided God’s will or ignored it
 - But now James’ warning becomes even more serious

James 5:1 **Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you.**

James 5:2 **Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten.**

James 5:3 **Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!**

James 5:4 **Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.**

James 5:5 **You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.**

James 5:6 **You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.**

- I said at the outset that this is warning spoken to the unbelieving Jew in these early Christian churches
 - Are you surprised that James would include a warning to unbelievers in a letter addressed to the Jewish churches in the Diaspora?
 - Why did James feel the need to address unbelievers? And why did he expect that they might hear this message?
 - Remember these letters were delivered to a city of people and were often copied many times as they circulated among the various destinations
 - That’s why we call many of the New Testament letters “encyclical” letters
 - And along the way, they were read aloud in various forums and to collections of interested crowds
 - Many times these readings prompted the interest of local religious leaders, including Jewish leaders from the local synagogue
 - James anticipated that his letter might reach the ears of some of these unbelieving leaders, so he took the opportunity to speak to them here
 - So James writes to the churches knowing that he actually has two audiences

listening

- James addresses these unbelieving leaders as “you rich”
 - Rich here means rich in every sense of the word
 - Financially wealthy, but also wealthy in power, knowledge and status
 - The Jewish leadership of that day were often a corrupt, self-serving elite group of men who used their position of power to take advantage of those under their charge
 - And they were hostile to the Jews who had come to know Jesus as their Messiah
 - James tells this group that their corrupt, evil behavior hasn’t escaped God’s notice
 - And James says these men should be howling and weeping because of the misery that is coming for them
 - James’ perspective in all of Chapter 5 is on the day we meet the Lord
 - For these unbelievers, that day brings a terrible outcome
 - He says they will find their riches rotted and garments moth-eaten
 - The precious metals they delight in will have rusted and be a witness against them
 - And that witness will condemn them, like a witness at a trial who points to the defendant and gives a damning testimony
 - James says it will result in their flesh consumed by fire
 - And the stupidity of it all...they spent their life storing up treasure on an Earth that was in its last days
- Then James gives examples of how these corrupt leaders obtained their wealth
 - First, they cheated day laborers who worked for them
 - Mowing fields refers to men who harvest the stalks of grain
 - These men would typically work for one day at a time, and they expected to receive their wages for each day at the end of the day
 - They would use these daily wages to buy the food and other goods they needed to get through the next day
 - But at the end of the day, these men would use some technicality to deny them their wages
 - James says these men cried out against this injustice, and these cries have reached the Lord of Saboath
 - The term Saboath means of the Host, emphasizing God’s might as Commander of the Host of Heaven and therefore His power to bring justice and retribution against these injustices
 - These men will receive their penalty one day
 - This life of luxury has only served to fatten them for the slaughter
 - And then to top it off, they condemned and put to death the righteous man who did

- not resist their injustice
 - This is probably a double reference
 - It refers to the men they cheated in their pursuit of wealth
 - But it ultimately refers to the way the Jewish leadership treated Jesus Himself
 - And the two pictures unite in the way believers went to their death in the same manner as their Lord
- James' warning offered no hope for these men
 - He doesn't propose any solution or redemption for these leaders
 - That's in keeping with Jesus' own declaration against the generation of Israel who rejected the Messiah
 - Remember from our Luke study that Jesus declared that because Israel's leadership rejected Jesus and declared Him to be the Devil, they blasphemed the Holy Spirit
 - And if you remember, we learned that the blaspheming of the Holy Spirit was a unique sin possible only in Jesus' days on Earth
 - It was the unforgivable sin that resulted in that generation of Israel who rejected the Messiah being condemned by Christ

Luke 11:29 As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, “This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah.

Luke 11:30 “For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.

Luke 11:31 “The Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

Luke 11:32 “The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

- Apart from a remnant whom God spared, Israel suffered the penalty of Jerusalem's destruction in 70 AD and the judgment fires of God's wrath at their death
 - And this condemnation came as a result of a corrupt leadership who preferred their riches and their power over the truth of the Gospel
- Today, we are still confronted by unbelieving men who assume leadership roles in society or even in the church and use those positions to take advantage of others
 - And when we see these injustices taking place, it's only natural to react against these people
 - Either to speak in critical ways against them or even to rise up against them in some way

- Sometimes we look for ways to take revenge, either for our own sake or for the sake of someone else who has been harmed
- I'm not talking about self-defense but rather retribution
 - And when we find ourselves in these situations, we need to consider our response carefully
- James says that those who were persecuted by these evil leaders did not resist, even to the point of their own death
 - And in that response, they earned praise in Scripture
 - Elsewhere, we hear Paul saying something similar:

Rom. 12:17 **Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.**

Rom. 12:18 **If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.**

Rom. 12:19 **Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord.**

Rom. 12:20 **“BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.”**

Rom. 12:21 **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

Rom. 13:1 **Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.**

Rom. 13:2 **Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.**

- Paul affirms James' teaching
 - Our Christian testimony requires we work to remain at peace with all men so far as it depends on us
 - And that doesn't mean so long as they are treating us right
 - We are to leave revenge to God
 - And we can trust that He will bring about that revenge
 - But we need to understand that true revenge and justice isn't achieved in this world, but it will happen in eternity
 - And we actually interfere with God's plan of retribution when we try to take matters into our own hands
 - Even if God's plan for retribution doesn't kick in until after evil men have put us to death, it's still a better plan than the one we can enact on our own in the moment
 - We may win the fight in the moment, but what are we risking losing in the eternal because we resisted authority or didn't leave room for the wrath of

God

- Instead, we heap coals upon their heads by responding to their injustice with kindness
 - This is a Biblical principle...when we refuse to take matters into our hands, we acknowledge a firm faith and trust in God's sovereignty over our situation
 - And we leave room for the wrath of God, Who can do far more in revenging injustice than we could ever do on our own behalf
 - And our kindness in the face of injustice against us brings further condemnation to those who are intent on harming us
 - It's an act of faith to withhold retribution
- James addressed the sins of the rich and corrupt leaders who persecuted the faithful, but what should the faithful themselves do in response to these men?

James 5:7 **Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains.**

James 5:8 **You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.**

James 5:9 **Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.**

- The Christian response to injustice is patience
 - The word for patience in Greek is *makrothumeo*, which means long tempered or delaying taking action
- And have an attitude that looks forward to the return of the Lord at the Rapture
 - Like a farmer that waits patiently for the harvest to come in, knowing that rains come both early and late in the year
 - In farming, the principle is not to get impatient and assume in July and August that the rain has stopped for good
 - Wait until the rain starts again late in the season, and then harvest when the time is right
 - Likewise, we don't want to rush the harvest
 - Don't think that justice won't happen, so we need to rush it along in our own power
 - Be patient
- James says believers respond to injustice by strengthening their hearts and reminding themselves that the coming of the Lord is not far off
 - Remember, the Bible's teaching that Christ is at the door is a teaching that recognizes that the Rapture is always imminent

- There is no prerequisite to the Rapture...it could happen at any time
- And don't let our troubles and frustration lead to speaking negatively against others, especially against those in the faith
 - When we speak badly of others, we judge them and that's not something we want to be doing when the True Judge arrives
- And who is to say that God might choose to use our patience and long-suffering as an opportunity to bring someone to faith
 - We can be sure that God is far more likely to use our patience than to use our impatience should we strike back
- James offers an example for us to follow in living out this difficult command of patience

James 5:10 As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

James 5:11 We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

- Think about the suffering and patience exhibited by the prophets
 - The New Testament gives us a wonderful summary of what the prophets faced in Chapter 11 of Hebrews

Heb. 11:32 And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets,

Heb. 11:33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,

Heb. 11:34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

Heb. 11:35 Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection;

Heb. 11:36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.

Heb. 11:37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated

Heb. 11:38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

- James says, use these men who suffered as our example

- This is a far cry from the triumphalism that has come to dominate parts of the Church, particularly the American church
 - We are not destined to conquer and dominate our world
 - We are not called to overcome the world with might and power and the Constitution
 - The United States is not God's country, it's just another Gentile nation of lost and dying sinners
- I'm as much a patriot as the next guy
 - But as Christians, when we consider how we are to respond to injustice and persecution, the Bible calls us to remember not the Founding Fathers, but the prophets of Israel
- And we use them as our example, so that we never presume to encroach upon God's role as judge
- James then gives his own example using Job, who endured more sorrow and injustice than any of us will likely face in our own lives
 - And still he faced his situation with patience and endurance, and he refrained from condemning the Lord
 - In fact, he endured his circumstances while still praising the Lord
 - And James says we should take note of God's compassion and mercy which He showed Job in the end
 - Remembering how Job became an example to us of how righteous men should respond to injustice and suffering

- Today our study of James draws to a close
 - What a powerful letter it's been, and it's certainly worth a moment of review
 - Chapter 1 – Consider it joy when you face trials, because they are tests sent by the Father to allow us to demonstrate our spiritual maturity
 - Such a life-changing perspective...it caused us to reconsider the way we face trials, turning them to good
 - Chapter 2 – Don't show favoritism when faced with men of different social status
 - View our brothers and sisters as God does
 - And when we show favoritism, we violate the Royal Law
 - And when we pass these tests, we declare our faith – or prove it – by our works
 - Chapter 3 – Guarding our speech is a key to avoiding a life of disobedience
 - And we yield to the Spirit to control our tongue, counseled by God's word, and endeavoring to put into action what we learn
 - Chapter 4 – If instead we seek for the world's wisdom and riches, it leads to discord and rivalries in the church
 - We lie against the Gospel by acting like the world
 - And our prayers go unanswered because we are praying in selfish motives
 - James gives a warning to the self-sufficient, prideful Christian who won't respect God's sovereignty
 - Chapter 5 – James opened with a warning against the rich and unbelieving Jews who persecuted the church
 - And now he finishes with a series of exhortations on how to live until the Lord returns
- As I said, those chapters were one convicting message after another
 - And the conviction was so powerful because James drives headlong into many of the core issues of the Christian walk
 - We all struggle with a faithful walk, with improper speech, with a selfish prayer life, with favoritism, with seeking worldly goals, with an unwillingness to live out our faith in righteous works
 - So as we finish James today, let's give careful consideration to the way James wraps up his message
 - Because James must have known that his letter would leave his readers reeling from so many blows to their ego and pride
 - And though the hits were necessary and appropriate, James doesn't want to leave us without a word of encouragement as well
- Last week, James encouraged us to practice patience by keeping our mind focused on the return of the Lord

- Don't be angry and don't take matters into our own hands
 - Remember I asked, if I told you the Lord was returning tomorrow, could you set aside your anger and desire for vengeance for just one day?
 - Patience is all about knowing that what we want is coming without our need to get involved

A small boy was looking at the red ripe tomatoes growing in a farmer's garden. "I'll give you my two pennies for that tomato," said the boy to the farmer, pointing to a beautiful, large, ripe fruit hanging on the vine.
"No," said the farmer, "I get a dime for a tomato like that one."
The small boy pointed to a smaller green one, "Will you take two pennies for that one?"
"Yes," replied the farmer, "I'll give you that one for two cents."
"OK," said the small boy, sealing the deal by placing his coins in the farmer's hand, "I'll pick it up in about a week."

- From patience, James moved to reminding us of the prophets and the need for endurance
 - Let me say it another way...we are to prepare for whatever life brings knowing that it's all temporary
 - And by our endurance, we please the Lord who will reward our patience in faith
- Now James finishes the letter with specific examples of how a patient Christian will live so as to demonstrate patience

James 5:12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.

- James says above all, a Christian should not swear an oath
 - Before we can understand James' concern here, we need to understand the specific action James is describing
 - He says we should not swear an oath either by heaven or by earth
 - He's speaking about making a promise or commitment and then giving an oath to assure a witness that we will keep our vow or word
 - James is not talking about the kinds of vows that are required by law, as in a courtroom
 - He's talking about voluntary vows we take upon ourselves to assure someone that they can trust us
 - Within the Jewish culture, any oath that mentioned God's name was considered to be binding and breaking the vow was punishable by law

- But oaths sworn by other things, including other things in heaven or things on earth were not considered binding
 - Pharisees would take advantage of this self-made loophole to avoid obligations when it suited them
 - And it meant that their word couldn't be trusted because they might swear upon things that sounded binding but later were deemed to be otherwise
- James says don't swear oaths at all, not by anything in heaven or earth
 - Don't bind your trustworthiness to someone or something else
- The first problem with vows is they should be unnecessary for a Christian
 - Consider what a vow means
 - It invokes the name of another entity as a judge or witness to your statement
 - It implies that a judge will be necessary to ensure we keep our word
 - Instead, James says if we want people to trust our word, just let our yes be yes and our no be no
 - Speak truth and keep your word, and you won't need vows or judges
 - Believers should be honorable in our promises and trustworthy in our speech
 - Making vows unnecessary
- Secondly, vows about the future are a form of impatience in waiting on God's plan
 - When we obligate ourselves to some future action by a binding vow, we are presuming to know God's plans for the future
 - And in our impatience to produce the future we prefer, some Christians may be tempted to make vows invoking God's name
 - This was particularly true in James' day
 - But James says. don't do this because you risk bringing judgment upon yourself
 - Because if you swear by God that you will do something in the future
 - But then God's plans for your life prevent you from keeping your vow
 - You are still obligated by your vow, and God will bring condemnation upon you for failing to keep the vow
 - Remember, if you choose to make a vow by invoking God's name, Scripture says that God will bring penalty upon you for failing to keep that vow

Eccl. 5:4 When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow!

Eccl. 5:5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.

Eccl. 5:6 Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands?

- Because these vows are binding in God's view, Jesus gives the same warning as James in the Gospels

Matt. 5:33 “Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.’

Matt. 5:34 “But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,

Matt. 5:35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING.

Matt. 5:36 “Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

Matt. 5:37 “But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil.

- Both Jesus and James are saying the same thing
 - If you vow by God's name, you are gambling that the future will turn out as you expect
 - And in your impatience to know and predict the future, you risk being wrong
 - And if you're wrong, God will hold you accountable for your rash vow
 - That's why James warns in v.12 that we risk falling under judgment when we vow
- And now for those “Type A” Christians (like me) who prefer action over patient waiting, James now gives the proper Biblical way to act in a godly patient way

James 5:13 Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.

James 5:14 Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

James 5:15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

- James asks, is there anyone among you who is suffering?
 - The Greek word for suffering means enduring hardship
 - James is asking is anyone enduring a difficult situation?
 - Who wouldn't answer that question “yes”?
 - James expects the reader to answer yes, and so here is his advice for how to respond to difficulties in a patient, godly way

- We pray, which is the purest form of patience and waiting on the Lord
 - Because it is an appeal on God's strength and will and ability
 - And the act of praying necessarily requires we stop acting first
- Can any of us honestly say that our first response to circumstances that make us angry or sad or scared or frustrated is to stop and pray?
 - But now can you see how patience and faithfully waiting on God requires prayer rather than taking matters into our own hands?
- On the other end of the spectrum, James asks if anyone is cheerful?
 - Here is the opposite side of impatience, and in our society it's at least as common as the first problem
 - When life is good and we're pleased with our circumstances, do we stop and consider the source of our joy?
 - Do we praise the Lord in our joy? Or do we congratulate ourselves and then make plans to increase our joy?
 - We have as much obligation to send up prayers of praise as we do prayers of petition
- In both cases of joy and sorrow, our patience and dependence on God is best displayed in a patient prayer life that turns to God first and consistently, rather than last and sporadically
 - Like the little girl who turned to God a little too late in her prayers...

It's bedtime, and a little girl is saying her prayers: "God bless Mommy and Daddy and me. And please make Madrid the capital of Australia."

Her mother, who is with her, asks why she wants Madrid to be the capital of Australia.

The child responds, "Because that's what I put on my geography test!"

- James moves to perhaps the most common situation facing everyone sooner or later
 - He asks in v.14 if anyone is sick?
 - How does someone respond in godly patience to a sickness?
 - James says call the elders and have them pray over the sick and anoint the person asking for healing
 - And the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick
 - And the Lord will raise up the sick person and forgive him for the sins he's committed
- This promise of Scripture is one many Christians have puzzled over, and many teachers have confused by their teaching
 - This is a specific kind of suffering that James is describing
 - And he's giving the proper way for a Christian to deal with this particular kind of

suffering

- First, let's examine the text carefully
 - We have the case of a sick person who needs healing
 - The sickness is an incapacitating sickness
 - The Greek word is *astheneo*, from which we get a similar word anesthesia
 - It literally means weakness
 - This person is weak and unable to get up
- Secondly, the elders are summoned to pray
 - The one who is sick must be the one to call the elders
- Third, the elders are to pray over this person
 - And anoint the person with oil
 - It's important to note that the elders are the ones to pray
 - We're not talking about the sick person praying
 - And the elders are to pray "in faith"
 - This phrase is similar to the instruction found elsewhere in Scripture to ask "in the name of the Lord"
 - The point is that the prayer is directed by the Spirit and is in accordance with God's will
 - The elders aren't praying with a belief in their ability to heal the person
 - They're praying with faith that it is already God's intention to provide the healing
 - If they don't share that faith, then they wouldn't participate in the prayer
- Fourth, the result of the prayer of faith will be the Lord raising up the person
 - The word for raise up is *egeiro*, which means to waken or bring to his senses
 - We're not talking about raising up in the sense of salvation or resurrection
 - We're talking about raising up in the sense of a physical cure strengthening the body
- Fifth, the sins of this sick person will be forgiven
 - Now why does James mention sins at all in this context?
 - What do sins have to do with the sickness or healing?
 - The answer comes from several clues
 - First, notice that the one who is sick must be the one to call for the prayer support
 - It must be initiated by the sick person taking a step to appeal for help
 - Then notice that the ones to be called are the elders, not men with gifts for healing or prayer

- James wants men of authority in the church to attend to this issue
- Then notice in v.16 James summarizes his instruction by saying that confessing sins to one another and praying over one another is the condition for healing and forgiveness
- James links all these clues because he's talking about a healing taking place in a certain situation
 - The situation is when a Christian is under God's discipline for an unconfessed sin
 - The discipline has taken the form of physical sickness or weakness
 - And the sick person is suffering under judgment and discipline
 - But if they take the step of patiently relying on the Lord for His mercy and forgiveness, they can be healed physically
 - The elders are involved to provide the opportunity for confession and prayer
 - And the prayers of these righteous men can accomplish much good
 - And James wants those in the church who have been sinning and receiving God's penalty in their bodies to repent and be healed in this manner
 - This is similar to the situation that Paul described in the Corinthian church

1Cor. 11:27 **Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.**

1Cor. 11:28 **But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.**

1Cor. 11:29 **For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.**

1Cor. 11:30 **For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.**

- How often have these verses been misconstrued to suggest that if the sick person has enough faith, they will be healed from their illnesses?
 - Besides the obvious mistakes in interpretation in that viewpoint, it also defies common sense and logic
 - No one can be healed forever
 - If these verses were intended by James to mean that we can expect a guarantee of healing provided we have enough faith, then take it to its logical end
 - Can I live forever if I maintain a perfectly faithful prayer life?
 - Or if I die of disease, would that mean my faith ran out?
 - All of these conclusions are absurd, and therefore they reveal the ridiculousness of the entire suggestion
 - As we see in the text, James wasn't promising that faithful prayer will always heal our bodies from illness

- He was promising that faithful confession of sins in the midst of praying elders will result in God's mercy and healing
- And when we find ourselves in this situation, the keys to healing are repentance and confession
 - Until we are willing to confess our secret sins, we have no hope to receive God's mercy
 - And we're not talking about salvation prayers here...we're talking about sanctification issues
 - Secondly, we must be willing to confess to others our faults
 - Private sin requires private confession and public sin requires public confession
- James then offers a classic example of how this process works

James 5:17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.

James 5:18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

- James uses Elijah as an example
 - And to make sure we are prepared to see the prophet as someone we can relate to, James reminds us that he was a man with our nature
 - He wasn't superman or super pious
 - He was like us
 - And following God's instructions, Elijah prayed and stopped rain in Israel for three and a half years
 - And when God was ready, Elijah prayed again and restored the rain
 - What do we learn from this example?
 - Firstly, what or who stopped and then started the rain?
 - God, of course
 - Not Elijah, it was God
 - Secondly, how were God's actions connected to Elijah?
 - God made clear to Elijah what He was prepared to do
 - And in both cases, Elijah sought for God's will to be done through his prayers
 - So in this way, Elijah's prayers given in faith were able to accomplish miraculous things
 - Because they were in accordance with God's will

- Our prayers can be equally effective in ending sorrow and weakness when we are appealing to God’s will and for restoration of those in sin
 - What a wonderful promise and privilege we have here
- Finally the end the letter, James writes

James 5:19 My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back,

James 5:20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

- Since James had just been dealing with the situation of the brother suffering as a result of his sins, he finishes with a general call to restore our sinning brothers and sisters
 - If anyone strays from the truth, James begins
 - This is a verse worth thinking about for longer than we have time today
 - How do we get into situations where we’re suffering under God’s discipline?
 - Why do we become spiritually weak and in need of healing prayer?
 - Because we depart from the truth
 - Departing from the truth means walking away from what we know in Scripture
 - It means walking away from what we’ve learned from the Bible
 - Or just walking away from the Bible altogether
 - As we look around and see so many churches and believers departing from the truth, is it any mystery why so many are facing numerous sorrows and weaknesses?
 - Could we be witnessing the mass discipline of the Lord against many of His children in an age of disobedience?
 - Paul said it would happen
 - He called it a great apostasy and said it was one of the signs of the end times
- But James offers us a hope here as well
 - He says that when a brother or sister turns one of these disobedient Christians back to the truth, to the word of God
 - We save this person from death
 - In verse 20, the word for “soul” is *psuche*, which is commonly translated life
 - In Greek it means the sum of our earthly life
 - In this context, it doesn’t mean preserving salvation but rather the preserving of his physical life
 - The reality of Scripture is that continual sinning has the potential to bring an early physical death as God’s judgment upon disobedient believers
 - Turning these brothers and sisters back to the truth should be our goal in fellowship

- To encourage each other to remain in the truth and dedicated to knowing and following it
- And to the extent we're able to accomplish this task, we are covering a multitude of sins
 - This is the calling and purpose of this ministry