

## The Weekly Word

June 20-26, 2022

Hello Bible readers. This week we will be reading James 2-3. I hope you are blessed as you join me. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

### Monday, June 20: James 1:26-27 NIV2011

<sup>26</sup> *Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.* <sup>27</sup> *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

#### What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

Although definitely connected, the two verses we read today focus on two related but independent issues.

In verse 26 James takes up the issue of the tongue and how we speak. This is an issue he will return to at length in chapter 3. James' admonition to the church is to keep a tight rein on your tongue. If we want to be "religious" then we must keep a tight rein on our tongues. According to James, if we let our mouths run then we are deceiving ourselves and our "religion" (piety) is worthless.

In verse 27 James rebounds off his final words, 'religion is worthless,' and goes on to explain the essence of real religion. James says it so well I think it is best to simply quote him. *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

#### What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

Two thoughts emerge from these two verses.

First, as Christ followers we must reign in our tongues. If we let them blab away (particularly when are sparked by anger, see 1:20) then we are not living the God-honoring life. James goes so far as to say we deceive ourselves and our religion (piety) is of no value. Christians learn to control your tongues.

James then gives a quick snapshot of what piety (religion) looks like if we are following the Lord, Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit. Piety has two aspects, the first is to take care of those who need help, people who are marginalized. In James' world two marginalized groups were orphans and widows. The second aspect is to keep our lives clean and pure, or as James puts it *from being polluted by the world*. To be faithful to God we must continually examine our lives, evaluating them against the teachings of Scripture and the way of Jesus.

#### What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

I'm hearing two things... Measure my words. Make sure especially when I am frustrated, angry, and hurt that my words are truthful and honoring of others including my God.

Secondly, God is saying put my faith into practice. Intentionally continue to bring myself before the Lord confessing my sin as necessary and seeking to grow in my faithful following of Jesus. One aspect of this is understanding God cares for those who are left out by the world... orphans and widows and other marginalized and forgotten groups. God's desire is that my faith in Jesus compels me to love and care for these people that society pushes to the edge.

### **What does this passage mean and say to us?**

In terms of the church, how we speak with one another and how we speak with outsiders matters to God. God wants our words to represent Christlikeness so the church must learn how to speak with one another in ways that honor, build up, and in ways that settled disputes with honor and dignity.

Also, the church needs to care for those who don't have the means or the social clout to care for themselves. In many ways this last word to the church is telling us to live the golden rule...

### **Tuesday, June 21: James 2:1-7 NIV2011**

*<sup>2:1</sup> My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. <sup>2</sup> For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, <sup>3</sup> and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," <sup>4</sup> have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? <sup>5</sup> Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? <sup>6</sup> But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? <sup>7</sup> Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?*

### **What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)**

The passage says, 'don't show favoritism'. James specifically targets favoring the wealthy over the poor. James makes his point very practical when he cites a hypothetical situation about how we might greet a rich person verses a poor person when they show up in worship. If we make a distinction favoring the rich person, James says we have *made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts*. (James names what's going on inside us as we judge people by their outward distinctions. James calls it 'evil thoughts'. That is a strong statement.)

James continues by showing how hypocritical it is to judge based on wealth. He begins by pointing out that God routinely chooses those who are poor financially to be rich in faith. Additionally, he notes that people who are rich are often oppressors who drag **you** into court. (James is clearly alluding to situations that people in his churches have faced.) James also notes that the rich are often the ones who blaspheme the name of Jesus.

**What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)**

The message to Christians is clear, we are not to show favoritism at all, and particularly not regarding personal wealth or poverty. We are called to follow Jesus who regularly dined with outcasts and sinners. (Obeying this truth is more difficult than it might seem because it is all too easy to implicitly judge people by how they dress and other outward characteristics that speak nothing about their heart.)

**What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?**

Internally I make 1000 judgments about people without ever speaking a word to them. This passage shows me that I am filled with evil because all too often my judgments are based on different aspects of favoritism...

God forgive me for my judgmental heart.

**What does this passage mean and say to us?**

It is so easy for us in the church to allow the kind of behavior that James is condemning to live in our church congregations. Lord forgive us.

**Wednesday, June 22: James 2:8-13 NIV2011**

*<sup>8</sup> If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. <sup>9</sup> But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. <sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. <sup>11</sup> For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. <sup>12</sup> So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. <sup>13</sup> For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

**What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)**

James continues his instruction about not showing partiality, and in the midst of his instruction he paints a very useful understanding of God's law and how if we break even the smallest part, we have broken the whole.

James reminds his readers that we are living well if we keep God's 'royal law', *you shall love your neighbor as yourself*. Based on this when we show partiality we are sinning, and as James puts it *are convicted by the law as transgressors*. (This is a serious indictment.)

James' mention of the law leads him to give a helpful teaching about how breaking the law even in one place means you are a law breaker. James reminds us that if we fail to keep even one point of the law, we are guilty of breaking all of it. He backs this up with illustration. And goes on to call us as Christ followers to speak and act as those who are to be judged under the 'law of liberty.' (I'm not certain what James means when he calls it the 'law of liberty'... there are always things to learn and this is one more element to add to my list.) James reminds us that those who are not shown mercy will be judged without mercy. He also reminds us that mercy triumphs over judgment.

**What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)**

There are two things critical for the church to pull from this passage. One is that God's heart is set against partiality and for that matter any breaking of the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves.

The second is the reminder that even if we break the smallest element of God's law, we are a lawbreaker subject to the full judgment and wrath of God, unless we have been granted mercy through faith in Jesus Christ.

**What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?**

I am a lawbreaker. I deserve wrath and condemnation. Only the gift of righteousness given by Jesus when I acted in accordance with the promptings of the Spirit and put my trust in Jesus can save me and will save me from the wrath of God I deserve. Salvation is a sweet gift from Jesus.

**What does this passage mean and say to us?**

As the body of believers, we must be careful not to show favoritism or partiality. When we do, we are breaking God's great commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. And when we break any part of the commandments or laws of God, we break the whole thing; we are law breakers subject to the judgment of God.

**Thursday, June 23: James 2:14-26 NIV2011**

*<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? <sup>17</sup> So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

*<sup>18</sup> But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. <sup>19</sup> You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! <sup>20</sup> Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? <sup>21</sup> Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; <sup>23</sup> and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. <sup>25</sup> And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? <sup>26</sup> For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.*

**What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?) What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)**

Today I have combined the first two questions into one response, as I have done a few times in the past.

Today's reading is possibly the most controversial in all of James letters. Martin Luther believed this letter to be of no value because of these verses. A simplistic surface reading of these verses could lead one to believe we are not saved by faith but by works, but that is not what James is saying. The point of these two paragraphs is that honest and true faith will result in us doing good works. And if there are no good works then the faith the person professes is not true faith.

This fits squarely with Paul's teachings about being saved by faith. For example, in Ephesians 2 Paul makes the strongest of claims that we are saved by faith not works so no one can boast. (see Ephesians 2:8) and then he concludes in verse 10, *for we have been created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do*. Saving faith of Ephesians 2 leads to good works. And saving faith of James 2 results in good works. It is the same teaching just expressed differently.

James says it well in verses 14 & 17, *What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?... So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*. James cites the example of Abraham who offered his son Isaac to God on an altar as an example of his works which was faith put into action. James also cites the example of Rahab and a hypothetical situation about brother and sister who are in dire need.

The teaching of this passage is straightforward: true faith, saving faith, will produce actions, i.e., works, in our lives. The works don't justify us, the works reveal that we have true faith.

### **What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?**

Can I see evidence of my faith in the way I live, in the "good works" that my life produces? This is what the Holy Spirit is saying to me today.

### **What does this passage mean and say to us?**

In our churches as we hold on firmly to the truth that we are saved by faith and faith alone we must also be honest that true faith, real faith in Jesus, will produce actions and works in our life that reveal the faith we have. Christian life is not merely mental assent to specific doctrines; it also includes faithful living that produces works that give glory to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

### **Friday, June 24: James 3:1-2 NIV2011**

<sup>3:1</sup> *Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.* <sup>2</sup> *We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.*

### **What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)**

James issues a strong warning to people in the church who are teachers or who long to become teachers. Teachers in the church will be judged more strictly. (As a pastor/teacher this verse always causes me to pause and reflect). After issuing this warning James states a hypothetical noting that we all stumble in many ways... *A person who is never at fault is able to keep their whole body in check*. (This seems to be a statement that James knows no one is able to keep. Verses 3 through 12 will confirm that no one is perfect in what they say).

**What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)**

Simply put 3:1 is a warning that if you want to be a teacher in the church or if you are a teacher in the church you will be judged by God more strictly. God will measure your words more precisely because of your role in teaching others the way of Jesus.

**What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?**

As I mentioned, since I am a teacher, these words always strike deeply into my life. As a teacher I need to measure my words making sure that they line up with the truth of the holy scriptures. Today God is reminding me of the sacred calling I have as a teacher in the Church of Jesus Christ.

**What does this passage mean and say to us?**

There is in this passage a subtle word to everyone in the church that our words matter, and that God is listening to what we speak, how we speak about God, and how we speak to others. Words matter.

**Saturday, June 25: James 3:3-12 NIV2011**

<sup>3</sup> *When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal.* <sup>4</sup> *Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.* <sup>5</sup> *Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.* <sup>6</sup> *The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.*

<sup>7</sup> *All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind,* <sup>8</sup> *but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.*

<sup>9</sup> *With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness.* <sup>10</sup> *Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.* <sup>11</sup> *Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?* <sup>12</sup> *My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.*

**What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)**

This morning James returns to one of his repeating themes, controlling one's tongue. This is one of his longest sections. The essence of his teaching is found in the middle verse 8, *no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.*

Verses 3-6 contains a series of three illustrations that show though very small the tongue is incredibly powerful, making *great boasts*. James speaks of a bit in an animal's mouth, the rudder of a ship and a small spark that can start a great forest fire. For this James concludes in

verse 6, *The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.*

Verses 7-8, even though humans can tame certain animals, no one can tame the tongue...

In verses 9 through 12 James laments that the tongue can do great good (praise our Lord and Father) while also producing tremendous bad (cursing other human beings). To this reality James laments, *this should not be*. He concludes with two other illustrations that show that two opposite outcomes should not flow from the same root (in other words our words should not be filled with both blessing and cursing). James asks can saltwater and freshwater come from the same spring. Obvious answer is 'no'. Can a fig tree bear olives or a grapevine figs? The obvious answer is 'no'. We're left to make our own conclusion that the tongue should not produce both blessing and cursing. In other words, brothers and sisters control your tongues.

### **What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)**

This passage is meant to cause us to realize how powerful the human tongue (our words) is and that we should use our tongues for good not evil. We need to be very careful that we don't weaponize our tongue against other people.

Christ followers realize... your words matter. And in order to control your tongue you have to pay attention to what you say.

### **What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?**

Ugh, control your tongue, Bill. Pay attention to how you use your tongue. Don't weaponize it against other people. Learn as best you can to control your tongue. Also realize how sharp and ungodly it can be when you lose control of your words.

### **What does this passage mean and say to us?**

If we consider this passage from the perspective of the group, our words matter. What we say can and does affect people. The church must not perpetuate lies and falsehoods or speak with the tone a voice that is injurious to others. What we say as the body of Christ matters.

I suspect it is also fair to say, what we do not say matters. When we don't speak truth in the face of lies, we are committing sin. (This statement requires more reflection and thought.)

## **Sunday, June 26, 2022 –Sunday Worship**

*If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.*

*If you are reading along with me from the Living Hope website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at [office@LivingHopeCT.org](mailto:office@LivingHopeCT.org).*

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