

OUR WALK

Sermon Notes

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Published by Wesleyan Publishing House
Indianapolis, Indiana 46250

These notes are to be used in conjunction with *Our Walk: Reflections on the Early Church* by Kenneth Schenck (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2015).

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ABOUT THESE NOTES

Kenneth Schenck's book, *Our Walk*, draws us back to the dynamic days of the early church through the eyes of James. As James pointed out, the proof of genuine faith is seen in our works, not our words. The aim of these notes is to put action to our profession of faith. If we do this, Christ will be visible in tangible ways.

You and your congregation will discover numerous lessons about personal spiritual growth and faith as you preach on *Our Walk*. Serving as Jesus' witnesses was not an easy assignment in the first century, nor is it any easier today. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit empowered the early church, and his power is still available.

TRIMPHING OVER TRIALS

James 1:2–12

INTRODUCTION

Do you know what's harder than finding a needle in a haystack? It's finding someone who has never experienced a trial. Senior citizens say old age isn't for sissies. They know what trials are. Aches and pains gang up on them. Medical bills challenge their income. And the loss of friends and loved ones challenges their emotional stability. Younger people, too, experience trials such as family crises, job stress, heavy financial debt, and broken relationships. Even babies have trials. Why do you think they kick, scream, and cry so often?

So what should we do when trials bombard us?

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Embrace Trials Joyfully

A. Respond with Pure Joy (James 1:2–3)

Sadness, anger, bitterness, and doubt may accompany trials, but if we capture the big picture we can rejoice.

Paul and Silas rejoiced in an inner cell of a prison (Acts 16:25).

B. The Reason for Pure Joy (James 1:3–4)

The testing of our faith develops perseverance (v. 3), which leads to spiritual maturity (v. 4). Have you noticed how many heavily tested believers have developed spiritual maturity? God uses trials to conform us into the image of his Son (Rom. 8:28–37).

A skilled wood carver has in mind what his finished product will be, so he chips away at a block of wood, getting rid of everything that doesn't resemble the finished product. So God uses trials like a chisel to chip away from us everything that doesn't resemble Christ. The trials may hurt, but if we understand their purpose, we can embrace them with pure joy.

II. Look to God for Wisdom

A. Ask for Wisdom (James 1:5)

We are invited to ask for wisdom when a trial overtakes us (v. 5). God will give us wisdom generously without rebuking us.

Of course our first thought is, “Why me?” However, we need to ask for wisdom to understand how to endure, how to use the trial to glorify God, and how to use it to share the good news.

B. Ask in Faith (James 1:6–11)

James cautioned us to trust God when we ask for wisdom. Doubt accomplishes nothing. We must see God’s eternal purpose in the trials. Whether we are poor or rich, we must realize that life is fragile, and therefore keep our eye on our eternal destiny.

III. Consider Yourself Blessed

A. The Blessing of Trials (James 1:12)

If we persevere under trial, we receive God’s favor, and can be happy in our trials.

B. The Reward of Remaining Steadfast in Trials (James 1:12)

Someday our trials will end, and it will be worth it all. We will see Jesus face-to-face and receive the crown of life.

CONCLUSION

When our next trial strikes us, let’s understand how it can help to mature us. Instead of moaning a dirge, let’s sing a doxology.

TWO KINDS OF LISTENERS

James 1:22–25

INTRODUCTION

A newspaper cartoon showed a man in a living room recliner. He heard his wife scream frantically, “George, the kitchen is on fire!”

“That’s nice dear,” he responded.

Obviously the man in the cartoon listened to his wife, but he failed to act upon what he heard. His response reminds us of the apostle James’ admonition to “not merely listen to the word. . . . Do what it says” (James 1:22).

SERMON OUTLINE

I. The Do-Nothing Listener (James 2:23–24)

A. Is Inactive

Those who are merely passive listeners of the Word deceive themselves. They should not simply listen; they should obey the Word. Do-nothing listeners may go to church every week and nod their approval of the sermon, but they walk out of church unchanged.

The multitude that received the bread and fish on the mountainside became do-nothing listeners when Jesus talked about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. They “turned back and no longer followed him” (John 6:66).

B. An Analogy

James compared the do-nothing listener to a man who looks in the mirror, goes away, and immediately forgets what he looks like.

Picture a modern man who is getting ready for work. He looks in the mirror and sees his hair is untidy, and his face is unshaven and covered with cereal. However, he does nothing about his appearance, and even forgets what he looks like. Can you imagine what his coworkers’ reaction will be when he arrives at work?

For a disheveled life, simply look in the mirror of the Word and do nothing about what you see there!

II. The Obedient Listener (James 1:25)

A. Does What the Word Instructs

Looking intently into the law that gives freedom means to stoop down to get a close look at what God's Word teaches. Discovering what God's Word teaches, the seeker then obeys what he or she learns and finds freedom in doing it.

Obeying God's Word keeps us from the snares of sin and Satan. There is great freedom in doing God's will.

B. Finds Blessing in Obedience

We are blessed when we obey God's Word.

CONCLUSION

If you ever find yourself in an area of an imminent flood and are warned by authorities to seek higher ground, obey the warning immediately and save your life. Sometimes a few people ignore the warning to their own peril. Obeying God's Word can save us much heartache and pain, but it also brings God's blessing. Let's be doers of the Word!

DOES YOUR FAITH WORK?

James 2:14–26

INTRODUCTION

Faith: trust, conviction, fervor. If you have faith, it will show. It's like having measles. The measles will show. But counterfeit faith is all talk and no show.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Counterfeit Faith

A. Worthless (James 2:14–16)

1. To the professing believer (v. 14). It cannot save him or her.
2. To others (vv. 15–16). Just wishing a needy person well does nothing for him or her, and faith without works is worthless. It is dead.

B. Lifeless (James 2:17–20, 26)

It is possible to believe the Bible from cover to cover and not have real faith. A person may look at a steak dinner, complete with salad and key lime pie, and believe it is savory, but he or she needs to partake of the steak dinner to prove that he or she believes it is delicious. Similarly, a person may say the gospel is the answer to sin, but he or she will not be saved until personally believing in Christ.

II. Real Faith

A. Illustrated (James 2:21–25)

A son asked his father for a car, but his dad told him he could not have a car until he read the Bible daily for three months, pulled up his grades, and got a haircut.

After three months, the son told his father he had read his Bible daily, and pulled up his grades to straight A's.

“But Son,” the dad answered, “you still haven't had a haircut.”

The son replied, “Moses and Samson didn't have a haircut.”

“That true,” the dad replied, “and they walked everywhere they went.”

Real faith obeys God completely.

B. Rewarded (James 2:23–25)

God rewards real faith. He rewarded Abraham by counting him righteous and his friend. He also rewarded Rahab by considering her righteous.

CONCLUSION

Every Saturday night one man in the hills of Tennessee listened to a Western band that had a radio program in Nashville. But the man did more than listen; he picked up his fiddle and played along, filling his home with music. Then one day his fiddle went out of tune. So he wrote to the band and asked its fiddler to strike a good, solid A so he could get his fiddle back in tune.

The world is waiting to hear a strong New Testament A. If our faith is real, we can and should strike a strong New Testament A.

CONTROL YOUR TONGUE!

James 3:8–10

INTRODUCTION

Imagine drinking and bathing in contaminated water for nearly twenty years. That's what some Massachusetts residents did. In 1969 in the Cape Cod region, the main water pipes were sprayed with perchlorethylene or PCE in response to complaints the water tasted funny. Exposure to PCE can cause stillbirths.

As James 3:8–10 points out, a water source cannot produce healthful water and polluted water at the same time; neither should the tongue. Which use of the tongue do we choose?

SERMON OUTLINE

I. The Polluted Use of the Tongue

The Polluted use of the tongue spews such poisons as:

- Cursing (James 10)
- Gossip (Prov. 18:8)
- Corrupt talk (Prov. 4:24)
- Lying (Eph. 4:25)
- Unwholesome talk (Eph. 4:29)
- Foolish talk/coarse joking (Eph. 5:4)
- Backbiting (2 Cor. 12:20)
- Anger (2 Cor. 12:20)
- Slander (2 Cor. 12:20)
- Arrogance (2 Cor. 12:20)

When someone from France migrates to North America and becomes a citizen of the United States or Canada, he or she gradually learns a new language, English. Similarly, when a person believes in the Savior and becomes a citizen of heaven, he or she leaves his or her old language and begins to speak the language of faith.

II. The Productive Use of the Tongue

Speaking as a Christian involves the productive use of the tongue:

- Praise (Rom. 15:11)
- Prayer (1 Thess. 5:17)
- Thanksgiving (1 Thess. 5:18)
- Worship (Ps. 99:9)
- Evangelism (Mark 16:15)
- Encouragement (1 Thess. 4:18; 5:11)
- Comfort (2 Cor. 1:4)

CONCLUSION

Tongue surgery may be necessary to treat cancer, and it may be very painful, although necessary. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit can “operate” on our tongues to get rid of all forms of bad language so we may speak words that help and heal.

Are we willing to submit to the Spirit for healing of the tongue?

FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

James 4:4

INTRODUCTION

The apostle James charged that friendship with the world is hatred toward God. So there are two kinds of friendships: friendship with the world and friendship with God. Which friendship should we choose? Isn't the answer obvious? The evil world system under the rule of Satan is under condemnation, is passing away, and one day will be completely destroyed. On the other hand friendship with God is blessed and eternal. Is God your friend?

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Friends Meet for the First Time (Gal. 1:15–16, 23)

Every Christian meets their best friend—God—at the cross. It was at the cross that Jesus extended his arms, one toward God, and the other toward us, and reconciled us (2 Cor. 5:17–18).

Paul wrote about the change that came into his life at the cross. He hated God and tried to annihilate believers, but God met him on the road to Damascus and saved him. He became God's friend. And he preached the gospel (Gal. 1:15–16, 23).

II. Friends Agree on Essentials (Phil. 2:2; 2 Tim. 2:2)

It would be almost impossible, perhaps impossible, to find friends who hold different interests, conflicting philosophies of life, and opposing political views. Christian friends may not agree on everything, but they agree on the essentials of the faith, love the Lord, are one in spirit, and hold the same purpose in life (Phil. 2:2). Furthermore, they endeavor to pass along biblical truth to others (2 Tim. 2:2).

III. Friends Spend Time Together

Friends enjoy one another's company. Similarly, being a friend of God includes spending time with him. Jesus, who spent much time in prayer, taught us to be alone with God in prayer (Matt. 6:6). First Thessalonians 5:17 counsels us to "pray continually." This counsel suggests we walk and talk with our Friend throughout each day.

CONCLUSION

Reportedly, a couple of deacons wanted to time their preacher's bedtime prayer. They thought it must be lengthy because the preacher seemed to walk closely with God every day.

So one night they sneaked into the preacher's home and positioned themselves to hear his bedtime prayer. They were surprised, however, when their pastor dropped to his knees and said, "Goodnight, Lord. It's been a wonderful day."

Do we enjoy such a close daily walk with our heavenly Friend?

HOW TO WAIT FOR THE LORD'S RETURN

James 5:1–12

INTRODUCTION

There are many viewpoints about the Lord's return, but we all agree he will return. Some misguided individuals have set a date for his return, sold their possessions and gathered on a hillside to wait for it. Others have quit their jobs in anticipation of his immediate return. But neither date-setting nor idleness are appropriate responses to the fact that the Lord will come again.

Here are a few of the responses we should take.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Be Aware the Lord Will Judge the Unbelieving Rich (James 5:1–6)

A. He Will Judge Their Greed (vv. 1–3)

Wealth and possessions will perish at the Lord's return.

Proverbs 23:5 offers a warning about desiring riches. It predicts their end. "Cast but a glance at riches and they are gone, for surely they will sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle."

B. He Will Judge Their Oppression (v. 4)

The rich landowners James indicted were guilty of withholding wages, but the cries of the workers reached the Lord's attention.

Perhaps you know the pain of working for an unscrupulous boss, who abuses his or her workers. The Lord is aware of all the injustice, and he will take retributive action when he comes again.

C. He Will Judge Their Self-Indulgent Lifestyle (v. 5)

The wicked rich were living luxuriously at the expense of others. Theirs was the so-called soft life, but it was gained at the expense of the hard life their workers experienced. Like fattened sheep or oxen, the wicked rich were fattening themselves for the slaughter they would meet at the Lord's return.

D. He Will Judge Their Inhumane, Unjust Treatment of Others (v. 6)

The rich were able to influence the courts to condemn and murder innocent men, probably to seize the innocents' property.

You may know someone who has reached the top of the ladder by stepping on the hands of others on the ladder. At his coming the Lord will judge such unconscionable people.

II. Be Patient (James 5:7–8)

A. Follow the Farmer’s Example (v. 7)

The farmer shows patience by planting and then waiting patiently for the land to produce crops. We, too, need to patiently wait for the Lord’s return. We cannot hurry his coming, but he will surely come at the right time.

B. The Lord’s Coming Is Near (v. 8)

Every day brings us closer to the Lord’s coming. It is near. Perhaps he will come today!

III. Be Brotherly (James 5:9–10)

While we wait for the Lord’s return, we ought to treat one another in a brotherly way. Grumbling against each other is unacceptable. We ought to put it aside because the Judge stands at the door.

How would you change your behavior if you realized the Lord, the Judge, was nearby?

IV. Be Like the Prophets and Job (James 5:10–11)

A. The Prophets

James’ readers had a rich heritage of prophets who spoke God’s Word boldly in spite of persecution. On page 100 of his book, *Our Walk*, Kenneth Schenck writes:

James mentioned the prophets as an example of patience in suffering. So many of them suffered as they spoke God’s Word! Hebrews 11 gives a list of faithful witnesses from the Old Testament, many of whom died while being faithful. According to one tradition, Isaiah died by being cut in half. James knew these prophets were held in high respect and admiration by believers everywhere. They were the heroes that Jews looked up to in their history. In the same way, James urged believers to be the heroes of his day, to endure persecution and suffering even if it would mean death. He ended with a reminder of God’s compassion and mercy. Suffering will not go on indefinitely.

B. Job

Job underwent a harsh, relentless, prolonged attack by Satan, who wanted to destroy his faith in God, but Job endured to the end. He didn’t understand why he was suffering, but he refused to curse God. He knew that even if he died, he would experience resurrection and see God, his Redeemer, with his own eye (Job 19:25–27). Finally, the trials lifted, and God honored Job’s faith (42:10–16).

May we keep our eye on the Lord through all our trials and remember that he is coming again. All trials will end when we see Jesus.

V. Be Honest and Trustworthy (James 5:12)

While we await the Lord's return, our honesty and trustworthiness should be obvious to all. When we say yes, we should mean yes, and when we say no, we should mean no. We should always say what we mean and mean what we say.

CONCLUSION

We do not know when the Lord will come again, but we should live every day as though it might happen today. Be patient, honest, and trustworthy, and believe God will settle all accounts when he returns.

Keep looking up!