

## WATERING DOWN THE GOSPEL

My kids – all kids, I would imagine – love Coca-Cola! When my kids were tots, on occasion we would treat them to a coke – *but it was always a diluted coke*. We would give them a glass containing half water and half coke. And it worked for years, until one day they noticed the Coca-Cola at granddaddy's house tasted a little stronger than the Coca-Cola at our house...

Surely there's nothing wrong with watering down a coke. It's a clever parenting tool to be used on unsuspecting preschoolers. *Use it while you can*. They'll wise-up later.

James, though, is worried about a different, and dangerous, type of dilution. He's concerned about the watering-down of the Gospel. There're people who've taken the Gospel – and to broaden its appeal – they've stripped it of its power.

It's been said, "The Gospel has been so diluted, if it were a medicine it would heal no one, and if it were a poison it would harm no one."

Leadership Magazine ran a cartoon once advertising today's church. The sign-board out front

reads, "The Lite (L-i-t-e) Church: 24% fewer commitments, home of the 7.5% tithe, 15-minute sermons, 45-minute worship services. We have only 8 commandments – your choice. We have just 3 spiritual laws – and have an 800-year millennium. Everything you've wanted in a church... and less!"

It's sad, but today "*the Lite Church*" is more the rule than the exception.

Churches preach an easy-believism that's not biblical. People are being invited to come forward and sign a card – say the right words – agree to a particular creed... it's as if salvation involved the same procedure as signing up for a retreat... It's as if the heart didn't matter – and commitment wasn't required.

We've forgotten what Philip said to the Ethiopian on the road to Gaza when he wanted to be baptized. In Acts 8 Philip tells him, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And James would agree! You have to believe with all your heart.

## JAMES

The book begins, "James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ," This James was actually the half-brother of our Lord Jesus. Matthew 13:55 mentions that Jesus had 4 half-brothers and at least two sisters.

We also know that James was not always a believer. John 7:5 tells us, "Even His brothers did not believe in Him." I imagine it was hard for James to admit his brother was the Son of God. Jesus and James played together in the sandbox. James lived in the shadow of his big brother. He had to listen to Mary, "James, why can't you behave more like Jesus?... James, a 'C' in conduct? Jesus brings home 'A+s' in conduct!"

Familiarity breeds contempt – and James was so familiar with Jesus he was slow to admit his brother's true identity. It was the resurrection that turned him around. 1 Corinthians 15 tells us that after His resurrection, Jesus made a special appearance to James. When he realized that His half-brother had conquered death, it dawned on James, why Jesus had always made 'A+s' in conduct. Hey, Jesus was God! James went from a *doubting brother* to a *devoted believer*!

James' faith grew rapidly. He became the leader of the church at Jerusalem.

In Acts 15 at the Council of Jerusalem, James was in charge. He was a man of great devotion. Eusebius, a church historian, said James "used to enter alone into the Temple and be found kneeling and praying for forgiveness for the people, so that his knees grew hard like a camel's because of his constant worship of God..."

James died in 62 AD. The Jewish leaders took James to the top of the Temple, and ordered him to recant his faith in front of the people. But rather than recant, he preached Jesus. The Jews became so angry they pushed James off the Temple – and when he survived – they beat him to death with clubs as he knelt and prayed.

In 1:1 James introduces himself, "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ". Remember, he was Jesus' blood brother. He could've referred to himself as, "*the Savior's closest sibling*", or "*kid brother of God*". Instead James is content to call himself a servant. He refuses to pull rank, or parade his status. He knows he's a sinner saved by grace – just like every other Christian. It's honor enough to simply be a servant!

James 1:7 warns the doubter, the double-minded man... "let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord..."

To *doubt* God takes you *out* from under the *spout* where God's blessings come *out*. Write it down... *doubt* takes you *out* from the *spout*.

Devotion Box -  
Out From Under  
The Spout

Bible Scan - James 1-5

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## Devotion Box - Count It All Joy ...

1:2, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials," Notice James doesn't say, "if you fall into various trials", but "when you fall into various trials". I wish I could tell you becoming a Christian immunizes you from trials and hardships, but it doesn't. Difficulties and persecutions are par for the course.

Yet when we face a trial we're told to "count it all joy". The New English Bible puts it, "Count yourselves supremely happy". What a strange command. Why be happy when I'm confronted with a trial? James tells us why in verses 3-4... "knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

James tells us the Christian *knows* that God uses trials for our own good... Every Christian has been to the cross - and at the cross we discovered that God turned the *world's worst tragedy* into the *world's supreme triumph*. At the cross we learn that God uses trials... In fact, God works miracles through trials!

Always remember, every miracle in the Bible began as a problem. We love the miracles, but we don't like the trials that precede them. Guys, count it all joy when you have a problem... your trial is God's opportunity to work a miracle!

James says trials produce two results - patience or endurance - and maturity and growth. It's been said, "God sends trials not to impair us, but to improve us." I've heard it put another way, "God never sharpens a knife on a stick of butter." It's our trials that keep us from becoming dull - that keep us spiritually sharp.

## Devotion Box - Saying "No" To Temptation

James 1:17 reminds us, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." This verse is the key to victory over temptation. You won't say yes to sin if you're convinced that you'll find every good and perfect gift in God. Satan sells "second best", and why opt for seconds - when God supplies the best.

Impulse buyers are counseled to freeze their credit cards in a huge block of ice. This way, when they're tempted to make a purchase, they have to wait until the ice thaws. The wait gives them time to think. When temptation arises we all need to take time to think... Remember the good and perfect stuff comes from God.

## PLAYING FAVORITES

James 2 warns us against playing favorites at church.

The flight to heaven isn't divided into first class and coach. We need to accept each other as Jesus accepts us. He loves each of us not because of the clothes we wear, or the car we drive, or the money we possess... He just loves us!

When you see a rich person walk into Calvary Chapel, and you think, "Wow, he could be a blessing to us... He could give a lot, or add some status, or we can use his lake house, or swim in his backyard pool..." - and you allow that kind of thinking to cause you to walk past the poor and disheveled fellow - completely ignoring the bag lady in order to shake hands with the rich guy - then something's wrong!

Once a street person wanted to join a church, but the pastor wasn't sure he wanted the likes of her as a member.

## BE A DOER

1:22, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only..." DL Moody once said, "Every Bible should be bound with shoe leather." In other words, the Bible is not just for hearing, or dissecting, or discussing, or debating... but for doing.

It's sad, but in the American church we have so much good Bible teaching that we've spawned professional connoisseurs. Like wine tasters they go from church to church sipping the teaching - commenting on its quality - but they never obey!

James tells us that to hear the Bible, and not do it, is deception. A person can hear it enough... they think they've got it... *but hearing ain't doing*.

The Word of God is like a mirror. It reveals the mind of God, and it reveals my own heart. It exposes my sin. Don't open the Word, then ignore its message because the message is hard and humbling. Guys, be a doer, not just a hearer.

## PURE RELIGION

1:26-27 define true religion. "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." True devotion to God controls my tongue and shows compassion on the weak.

Until she died, my dad drove downtown every Sunday afternoon to visit his invalid sister in the nursing home. He would buy Ann a Coca-Cola, and then just sit and chit-chat. During the week Ann would call the house constantly to make sure he was coming on Sunday. She was lonely and just wanted to talk. And whenever we boys got annoyed at our aunt's relentless phone calls my dad would remind us of this verse in James. *Taking time to show an interest in people who can never pay you back is the purest form of service to God.*

He told her to give him a week to think it over. After a week he said he needed another week - and on it went for months. Finally, God spoke to the woman, "My dear child, don't worry about getting into that church. I've been trying for 20 years, and they won't let Me in, either."

In 2:8, "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors." No man is strong enough to carry a cross and prejudice at the same time. You can't be a *saint and a snob!* It's okay to have a *close circle of friends* - just as long as it doesn't become a *closed circle of friends*. The church is no place for cliques.

## FAITH AND WORKS

2:14 raises an interesting question, "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?"

Notice, we're talking about a man who says he has faith... but lacks evidence. There are no works in his life to prove that his commitment is legit... Can that sort of faith save him? In other words, what constitutes *true saving faith*?

He provides us the answer. Verses 15-17, "If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

If I told you a bomb inside this building was about to detonate – yet 10 minutes later you were still sitting here chit-chatting, it would be safe to conclude that you didn't really believe that I said. When I issued the warning you may've nodded, or winked, or said you believed me wholeheartedly, but the fact you never acted on what you believed proves that you really didn't believe it in the first place.

Real faith, saving faith, the faith that gets you to heaven - is faith to the extent that I'm willing to act on what I believe. It's a commitment to the point of action!

In verse 18 James plays the antagonist, "But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. Faith is faith and works are works. And make no mistake, "salvation is by faith alone, but if you're really saved faith will never be alone..." But true faith – saving faith – is always accompanied by good and godly works.

Verse 24 is a confusing verse to many. James says, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." That seems to oppose Paul's words in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any one should boast."

### Devotion Box - Tongue Taming

3:2 tells us, "For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body." If you can control your tongue – the words that you speak - you can control the rest of your life.

In verse 5 James is amazed at how a little thing like the tongue can cause so much damage. It's like the single spark that burns down the whole forest. Guys, it's impossible to overestimate the damage that can be done by two loose lips.

Verse 6 says the tongue is "set on fire by hell." Hey, a wagging, gossipy tongue is Satan's weapon of choice in his battle against God and His Church.

It's amazing, but from the same mouth comes blessing and cursing... One moment we're praising God, and the next, we're picking a brother apart. Verse 10 says, "My brethren, these things ought not to be so." Guys, it's time for us to put a cork in it. Ask God to change your heart, and tame your tongue.

Martin Luther was so upset with James that he called his letter, "a right strawy epistle..." In other words, in his mind, it had little value. He doubted its inspiration.

But there's really no contradiction. The so-called conflict clears up when you understand the two authors... Paul was a theologian, adept at abstracts. James was the son of a carpenter, concerned with finished products. Paul's letters are spiritual schematics, focusing on the inner workings of faith. James provides a prototype, a model of what real faith will look like when we see it. *Paul x-rays the roots of faith. James eyeballs the fruits of faith.*

Paul says faith comes first and produces works. James says works always follow faith, and are evidence of faith. Package both perspectives and you see the picture perfectly... Your faith is not a faith that saves unless it's a faith that works!

James says in 2:19, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble!"

Faith is more than intellectual assent. A demon has faith, but it's not saving faith. His faith scares him - it doesn't save him. A demon is orthodox in his doctrine - but just agreeing on the facts is never enough!

The rest of chapter 2 provides two examples of faith that works - Abraham and Rahab. In both cases, faith went first – and then faith was evidenced by works. James makes his point in 2:24, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." And in the context in which James is speaking he's right. If faith inevitably produces works, then you can't have real faith without works.

James looks at faith and works as a continuum. He's not worried about where faith ends, and works begin. It was left up to Paul to divide our salvation into parts, and explain that faith, not works, is the element that saves. But for James... *why separate the root from its fruit...* Hey, you can't have one without the other.

### TWO TYPES OF WISDOM

3:14-18 contrast two types of wisdom – earthly and heavenly wisdom. Earthly wisdom is bitter. It divides us, and pits people against one another. It's envious, and self-seeking, and egotistical. It creates factions and friction. Look at its bloodline... James says in verse 15 it's "earthly, sensual, demonic." Earthly wisdom is "a win - lose" deal. Someone always ends up on top, and someone always ends up on the bottom. But God's wisdom is a "win - win".

One year, my daughter's softball team played for the league championship - but in the second inning it started to rain... and rain... and rain. Here was an opportunity for the Softball Association to declare both teams co-champs – make two sets of girls happy - and let the parents go home. But no! There had to be a winner and a loser so we wasted all afternoon waiting on the rain to stop... God's wisdom looks for ways everyone can benefit. Man's wisdom looks for ways one side can win. Verse 17, the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable..."

For those of us below, we need wisdom from above. In our marriages, in our church, in the workplace—we need heavenly wisdom!

# Bible Scan - James 1-5

Calvary Chapel

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - [sandyadams@calvarychapel.org](mailto:sandyadams@calvarychapel.org)  
For back issues of Bible Scan study guides: [www.calvarychapelstonemountain.com/biblescan.htm](http://www.calvarychapelstonemountain.com/biblescan.htm)

Calvary Chapel Announcements - Friday, Saturday, & Sunday, 12/20-22, *Christmas Gift Wrap Outreach*—sign up in lobbies or in the Café...  
Sunday, 12/22 6-8 pm—*Reindeer Games* - Family Fun Night....Tuesday, 12/24 @ 4:30 and 6:30 pm— *Christmas Eve Services*....Tuesday, 12/31, 9  
pm, *New Year's Eve in The Brook*...

Next Bible Scan - January 5, 2003 - 1 Peter 1-5

"Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." - James 5:16

Bible Scan  
Memory Verse

## DEO VOLENTE

5:13, "Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow." No one knows what tomorrow will bring.

When you start getting dogmatic, "I will do this", or "I will do that", you've lost touch with the reality of life. Life is full of unexpected twists and turns... It's been said, "Life is like fighting a gorilla. You don't rest when you get tired. You rest when the gorilla gets tired." There's a lot in life that's beyond my control.

Verse 15, "Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." The Puritans were fond of the Latin expression, "*Deo Volente*", or "*God willing*". When the early Methodists signed their letters they added the initials, "*D.V.*", or "*Deo Volente*". Their plans were contingent on *God's plans*.

A key to success in life is the ability to be adaptable. God is sovereign, and can redirect us through our circumstances. The saying is true, "The bend in the road is not the end of the road if you're willing to make the turn."

Verse 17 tells us, "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin." Since we don't know what the future holds - or if we personally will be a part of "*the future*" - then while we have an opportunity to do good we should just do it! Serve God today. Count for Jesus today. You may not have tomorrow...

## Devotion Box - You Lust And Do Not Have

Verse 2 "You lust and do not have." King Solomon had gold, ambition, women – he tried it all – yet he concluded in Ecclesiastes 2:1, "I said in my heart, 'Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure'; but surely, this also was vanity." "You lust and do not have" – is the inevitable result of every pursuit of pleasure. Only God satisfies!

## Devotion Box - Two Views

We're also told to "submit to God" and "resist the devil". "*Resist*" - don't "*retreat*"! Take a stand – call the devil's bluff – stand in Jesus' name. When the devil tempts you, remind him of the cross and his defeat. Resist him and he's forced to flee! 4:8 adds, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you". Kent Hughes writes, "There are two views which the Christian ought to cultivate with all that he has: the devil's back, and the face of God."

## IS ANYONE SICK ?

5:14 asks, "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up." It's ironic, we use sickness as an excuse not to come to church – but James says it's a reason to come to church. If you're sick call for the elders!

Understand I'm not against doctors. God chooses to heal both *medically* and *supernaturally*... Sometimes, though, we're too quick to trust in doctors. Think of the money you could save by going to the elders first. A visit to church is free... and we don't make you wait forever in a waiting room with other sick people!

God gives to the leaders of the church the responsibility of praying for you.

And here James tells us to anoint the sick person with oil? In the Bible, olive oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit - and the dabbing of a little of that oil on the forehead - is a tangible contact point where the people praying can focus their faith.

We're asking God to heal, *but when? and how? and why? When?* How about when the oil is applied. *How?* By the oil of the Spirit. *Why?* Because Jesus was crushed like an olive, and His healing power flows to us...

## Devotion Box - Effective Prayer

5:16 ends, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." What an incentive to pray! God answers persistent, God-glorifying, heart-felt prayer.

James gives an example in 5:17, "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours," Elijah stood-up to the prophets of Baal and called fire down from heaven – but afterwards he tucked tail and ran from a wicked old lady, "*Jezebel*". Elijah wasn't superhuman. He stood strong, but he also grew discouraged and wanted to quit.

Elijah was a *regular guy* who lived a *righteous life*. He desired to please God and knew how to pray. Armed with the same you too can accomplish great things.