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JAMES

Preparation and Perspective

James 1:9-27

- I. Faith Made Personal
 - a. The Bible was written for us, but it is not primarily about us
 - i. We can often make even our faith self-centered and run to application before understanding observation and interpretation
 - ii. But James is the rare occasion that we are told to look at ourselves, as a man would look into a mirror, to examine ourselves
 - iii. Hebrews – the supremacy of Jesus, followed by the question “do you believe this?”, and then closing with what faith looks like lived out through the body of Christ
 1. Loving one another, loving strangers, loving the prisoners, loving our spouses, submitting to leadership within the church, so that the body is healthy and effective
 - b. James makes faith personal
 - i. Deals with the condition of our hearts, the condition of our souls
 - ii. Deals with the work that God desires to do within the individual to grow their trust and dependence on Him
 1. Let’s review the first 8 verses

Jas 1:1-8 James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings. (2) My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, (3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. (4) But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (5) If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (6) But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. (7) For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; (8) he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

- c. Two big lessons
 - i. Trials are coming – not if, when – why is this important to know?
 - ii. Have you ever been sucker punched? Been hit and you just were not prepared for it? No time to react, no time to defend yourself?
 1. What if you knew that punch was coming, and you trained for it, like a prized fighter?
 2. ***Joh 16:33 NKJV These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.***
 - iii. What kind of trials? Various – trials of the mind, trials of the body, trials of waiting, little trials that feel like big trials, big trials that feel like big trials
 1. Trials are coming, in fact for some of you the trials are here
 2. And it’s not one trial, it is a lifetime of trials – happy New Year! Be ready for them, be prepared, don’t get caught off guard!
- d. The second lesson
 - i. Trials are good! Because God is good. Trials are a necessary tool to help us see Jesus more clearly. To grow and mature our trust and dependence on Him.
 - ii. To strip away all the lesser things in our life so that all we have left to lean on is Him

1. Trials grow our faith and that means trials are wonderful. - count it all joy when you fall into various trials - the testing of your faith produces patience. (4) But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing
2. The book of James is about preparation and perspective – be ready because this life isn't easy but don't worry, God is good – James is teaching us to fully realize this fundamental truth

Jas 1:9 Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, (10) but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. (11) For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits. (12) Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

II. Looking Horizontally

- a. Preparation – various trials will come, be ready. How? If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally
 - i. Warning – don't doubt – don't be double minded, stand firm in your faith “Lord give me your heart, give me your perspective, give me your insight – I don't want to lean on my own understanding because my understanding is limited”
 - ii. When trials come resist the temptation to doubt
- b. Verses 9 -12 are a continuation of this warning – doubt grows in the fertile soil of an earthly mindset
 - i. Paul writes - Col 3 - Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. Romans 8 Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace
 - ii. The earthly mind looks horizontally, the Spiritual mind looks vertically – the carnal man, the worldly man, is constantly comparing himself with the people around him (his view of himself fluctuates between too high and too low)
 1. The spiritual man is constantly looking to Jesus for a correct understanding of himself
- c. There have been numerous studies done on the effects that social media is having on our minds
 - i. Here's what these studies are finding – Facebook and Instagram are causing depression
 - ii. Former Facebook VP recently spoke about the tremendous guilt he deals with over growing the social network, which he feels has eroded “the core foundations of how people behave by and between each other.”
 - iii. “We curate our lives around this perceived sense of perfection, because we get rewarded in these short-term signals — hearts, likes, thumbs up — and we conflate that with value and we conflate it with truth. And instead, what it is fake, brittle popularity that's short-term and leaves you even more vacant and empty (then) before.”
 1. Think about it – your marriage is struggling – how does everyone else's marriage look on Instagram; your lying in bed at night, no make up on, wearing old pjs, what is everyone else doing?; you had a rough Christmas, you had to spend it alone, you had to work, how did everyone else's Christmas look?
 2. There's no pain, there's no trial, there's no tears on Instagram – that isn't life
 3. The worst thing you can do in the middle of a trial is consume a steady diet of social media and news - and that sets your mind on earthly things – horizontal comparisons – and we lose that all important thing during a trial – perspective
 - iv. That is what the prodigal's brother was lacking – dad where's my feast, where's my blessing? Do we see what we are doing? Questioning our Father's goodness.
 1. This year we may need to evaluate the time we spend looking horizontally and commit to seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness

(13) Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. (14) But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. (15) Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (16) Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. (17) 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. (18) Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

III. God Gives God Gifts

- a. Trials are coming, but they are good, they mature us, they grow our faith, they open our eyes to the person of Jesus. Be prepared for doubts, and when they come don't look horizontally at others, look vertically to Jesus – ask for wisdom
 - i. Doubt can be a potential pitfall our road to spiritual maturity, now James warns us of another possible pitfall – temptations
 - ii. Temptations are different from trials even though they often show their face during a trial
 - iii. What's the difference? – simply put - trials are the difficult circumstances of life orchestrated by God, temptations are the pleas of our old nature begging us to bail on our faith and take our needs into our own hands
- b. There are many different definitions for sin but one of my favorites is this: sin is meeting a legitimate need in an illegitimate way
 - i. We all have natural, God given desires, God given needs, the need to love and be loved, the need to be part of a community, the need to eat, we have been created with sexual desires, the desire to happy, to be fulfilled, to have purpose
 - ii. God's Word tells us that He will provide for our needs
 - iii. Temptation comes along and tells us, we don't need to wait on God to have those needs met, we can meet those needs on our own – as we do those natural desires become twisted and perverted, we train ourselves to want things right away – develop that instant gratification mindset
 1. "I don't want to invest the time it takes for God to cultivate true, lasting joy in my life, I'll settle for momentary pleasure"
 2. As we go down that road we begin to lust for things we were never meant to have, covet things we were never meant to possess and our lusts become a tool for the enemy to control us
- c. True faith says I don't want anything unless it comes from the hands of my Father, because His gifts are the best
 - i. There's no darkness in Him, no shadow of turning – His motives are clear and He doesn't change His mind - ***Joh 10:10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.***
 - ii. God is a giver and when He takes, He takes to give something better
 1. Some of us are clinging to lesser things – our desires have been twisted – we have settled for something far less than what God wants to provide
 2. I remember reading in David Nasser's book, A Call to Die, a terrible account of the orphans in Calcutta, India. In it he wrote about his work with a non-profit hospital called the House of the Dying. Each day they would take their trash out back, trash that contained biomedical waste, mixed with whatever trash a hospital produced and every day they would come back to find children eating out of this trash.
 3. These children didn't have a choice, but as David Nasser points out, we do.
 4. He writes "You and I are at the banquet table of God's presence and truth, but too often we are so full of junk that we're not hungry. In actuality, spiritually, we are starving to death. "Many of us are like those kids scrambling for garbage. We elbow each other at the mall, at the theatre, in the back seat, at home, at work, on

the net, and at school in our hunger for food, but the food we lunge and fight for is rotten and diseased – and we eat it.”

- a. But Jesus says “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst”
- d. The temptation to settle for the world’s poor excuses for satisfaction doesn’t come from God, it comes from our own sinful hearts
 - i. In the midst of a trial there is always a temptation to hit the eject button on our faith, and go get what we are after
 - ii. This is very important time - the space in-between – that period of time between God’s promise and the fulfillment of that promise
 - iii. Such a vital time in our walk with the Lord - That space in between is where our faith is shaped – Abraham and Sarah and their child of promise, Isaac and Rebekah and their child of promise, the Israelites and the Promised Land, Joseph’s dream of becoming a ruler, David and the throne, Mary and Martha and the resurrection of their brother, the disciples and the resurrection of Jesus, the church and Christ’s return
 1. It’s in that waiting period that God is cultivating a deeper trust, a deeper faith
 2. Will we trust in the character of God or will we take control?
 3. I’ve personally seen how being the god over my own life only leads to death and I have also seen what happens when you let go and trust God to be your provider
 4. The key warning in those verses - Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren – How many of you like being tricked? Being fooled? Being taken advantage of? Yet, we often put ourselves in positions knowing how the story ends.
 - a. My dad and computers (color blind test)
 5. Temptations will come, be ready, call them out for what they are, lies – don’t be fooled by the lights and sounds of this world

(19) So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; (20) for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. (21) Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

IV. Listening, Speaking, and Anger

- a. James has a lot to say about these topics throughout his letter, so we will no spend too much time on them here
 - i. But I will say this, the spiritually mature man patiently listens, takes his time to speak, and is not easily angered. He guards what comes out of his mouth.
 - ii. If this doesn’t describe us then James has provided us with a mirror and we have some growing up to do
 - iii. That wrath, that anger, that hatred for our brother, does not produce the righteousness of God
 1. James will have a lot to say about our personal behavior, what we say and what we do, not because good behavior earns us salvation, or even protects our salvation
 2. Here’s why what we do is important...

(22) But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (23) For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; (24) for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. (25) But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. (26) 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. (27) 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.

- b. There’s that phrase again - deceiving yourselves
 - i. The American church is a church deceived – James just described America’s Sunday ritual – For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing

his natural face in a mirror; (24) for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

- ii. That isn't faith. But somehow we have convinced ourselves that it is. "If I just hear the Word of God and nod my head in agreement, that's enough, that's faith." No, no it's not.
- iii. We don't agree with what we have heard unless we live out what we have heard. Agreeing with God's Word is living out God's Word. If we are not living it out, we don't agree with it.
 - 1. We may agree with it for others, but we certainly don't agree with it for ourselves
 - 2. Like the doctor who smokes and tells his patients not to, or the out of shape personal trainer, or the dentist who doesn't brush and floss – that's how we raise our kids, I want God's will for their life, just not my own.
 - 3. That was the state of the church then and that is the state of the church now – people who have deceived themselves – they regularly hear the Word and continue to live lives that are in direct rebellion against what God's Word says
- c. The remedy? he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does
 - i. The one who looks directly at the cross, looks directly at the liberty, the freedom that was purchase by Christ's blood, the one who looks at the work of the cross and understands that's how much the Lord loves me, His ways are good, His gifts are perfect – God lead me, I'm yours – this one will be blessed in what he does