

September 26, 2021 Praying God's Truth Over My Fears
James 4:7-10

Who was James, and what do we know about him? This follower of Jesus was in fact the younger brother of Jesus. He did not find it easy to follow Jesus. In John's Gospel, chapter 7:5 we are told that his "brothers" did not believe Jesus claims to be the Messiah. In Luke's account in the Acts Of The Apostles, we are told that Jesus brothers, joined the movement with their mother following the resurrection, and presumably Jesus appearance in the upper room on the Sunday evening. James became one of the leaders of the infant church in Jerusalem. He was martyred for his faith. He was crucified in Egypt, where he served as a missionary.

The letter which James wrote was not directed as a communication to a specific church. It was sent out to all of the believers, the followers of Jesus, the Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. It is interesting to note that Martin Luther, that giant of the Protestant Reformation, had doubts about keeping the letter of James in the Bible. It has always been included and recognized as sacred script. Luther's concern is the heart of this letter which emphasizes that if faith in Jesus is real, it will affect the way we live, the way we do everything that we do. The emphasis of James on works was the reason Luther was suspicious of its value. In the end, Luther decided, to keep it in the Lutheran Bible because it always had been one of the 66 books that make up the canon of Holy Scripture.

That was wise on Luther's part. In the 60's and '70's there was a popular poster that circulated among the so-called Jesus Freaks, the Christian version of the hippie movement. You may remember that poster. It looked like a wanted poster and what it said was, IF THEY ARRESTED YOU FOR BEING A FOLLOWER OF JESUS, WOULD THERE BE ENOUGH EVIDENCE TO CONVICT YOU? James is the source of that question. He wrote in what we call James chapter 2 verse 25, that faith without "deeds, is dead." His premise is that the works we do, the way we actually live, should provide the physical evidence that we really believe.

In the brief passage I read to you we can capture, why I said Luther was wise to keep this letter by James as part of the Bible. James instruction is blunt and to the point. "Submit yourselves then to God." And I urge you to notice he did not write submit yourselves to God's church. The church is not perfect. The church like any other organization known to man makes mistakes. It has been and it will be guilty of sin. Why because it is made up of people like you and I who have good days and bad days, are strong one moment and weak the next, are bang on when we stick to what Scripture teaches, and who can go off the rails by doing simply what we believe to be reasonable or rational, elevating ourselves to positions of authority. "Submit yourselves to God."

That is one of the statements in James letter that defines what faith is and at the same time defines what faith does. When we believe we put ourselves in God's hands. Come

what may. And the proof is in the history. James died, as did Jesus, on a cross, because there was indeed enough evidence to convict him of following Jesus who is the very Son of God and Savior of the world. So James calls us to radical faith. Submit to God. Dare to be like Daniel. Dare to be an Abraham. Dare to be an Isaiah, proclaiming that God will lift you up on eagle's wings.

Secondly in this little Gospel filled group of verses, James tells us to "Resist the Devil." The universe as James saw it is very clear. God is good. God is holy. He calls us to serve him and neighbours who need us. The Devil is a force for evil. He calls us to resist goodness. To watch out for number one exclusively. And the really important word in that last statement is to care about oneself exclusively. The Devil tempts us to not react or respond to need as the good Samaritan did. He urges us to leave the wounded to die, rushing off in the name of pursuing our own safety, or our own profit.

But James does not just say "Resist the Devil." He has learned from his own struggles, trying to figure out if Jesus was for real. "Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you." You and I, by the grace of God have the power within our reach to do what is right and to be at peace in the doing. The Devil flees from those who resist his temptations. He flees from those who submit themselves to God. And James is telling us in the subscript as it were, 'I know what I am talking about. I have walked that road. I have been there. I follow HIM who is the Way,' Jesus, the very Son of God.

“Come near to God, and HE will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, (because we all are). Repentant sinners but sinners nonetheless. We have faith because we know enough to draw near to God. Is that not why we gather? Is that not what we seek and crave? James reminds us that no heart, no mind, no soul, draws near to God and is left on their own to face their difficulties and problems. If you seek God, God will find you. That is the story of redemption. The reference to the washing of hands is a reference to baptism. James is issuing that age old invitation. Come to God. Be baptized if you believe. Be made clean by God’s grace “you double minded.”

One of the tragedies of life is double mindedness. Thinking that we can have our cake and eat it too. “Submit to God.” “Resist the Devil.” Make the choice he is saying to all of us and then live the choice you have made. Walk in the way of Jesus. Love your neighbour. Do good to them that hate you. Remember Jesus on the cross? “Forgive them Father, they do not know what they are doing! Singlemindedness. No mixed motives. A single minded dedication to do the thing that is right that will bring blessing to all who come to believe.

Submission to God is the single hardest thing for the mind to grasp, for the heart to bear, and for the will to enact. We want control. We believe so deeply that we can handle the situations that arise all on our own. I can do this. Submission to God is radical faith. Radical has to do with roots. Radical faith is

rooted faith. Without roots the tree dies. Without roots the tree falls down and rots. Without roots we have not chained ourselves to stand against the storms that come. Loss of loved ones. Loss of friends. Our own mortality. We only have a space of limited time. James recognizes it matters how you spend the time you have. He says grieve, and wail and be gloomy, about what you have done being double-minded.

And that brings us to verse 10. "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord." That is the KJVersion. What we have here in the NIV means the same thing. "Humble yourselves before the Lord. Where HE can see you. "Humble thyself in the sight of the Lord, and HE will lift you up." I learned a chorus in California back in the 1980's when I was earning these stripes on my sleeves. Doctor's bars. It goes like this. Some of you will recognize it. "Humble thyself in the sight of the Lord...(Humble thyself in the sight of the Lord). And HE will lift you up. Higher and higher and HE will lift you up." James 4:7-10

So...let us pray God's truth, over our fears.

Lord God Almighty, Jesus who redeemed and saves, Holy Spirit our Comforter: Help us we pray to submit to your will, to submit to your guidance, to submit to your way. Grant that we might resist temptation and evil in all their forms. Draw us nearer, nearer, nearer God to thee, that we might experience your grace, your love, your comfort, in difficult times and making hard choices. Wash us in the blood of Jesus that we might be clean in your sight. When we are tempted to try and

be yours, but also to be at one with the world, help us to be single-minded and committed to you and your way. Lord grant us humility before you and among our neighbours. Lift us up, when we are down. Grant that we might overcome in the joy and sweetness of your loving Spirit. In Jesus name we ask.

Amen