

XIV. James in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel Life According to James
“True Religion and the Tongue”
James 3:1-12
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March 9, 2014 – Morning Sermon

We are in James 3 and our fourteenth study of the book of James. I want to set the tone for this study in the Gospel life according to James by reading some key verses in the first chapter. James 1:26-28 says [26] *If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. [27] Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.* The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I am working on a number of books that I can't quite seem to get to or finish but one I would love to write would probably be titled 'Ten Questions Faced by Every Pastor Most Every Day of Their Life.' Some of these questions are repeated on numerous occasions and I'd like to publish my top ten and give it to preachers so they could read it and be ready with the answers. Here is one of those questions that I get regularly; 'Pastor, the Bible says it is appointed unto man to die and then the judgment. Will Christians be at the judgment Seat of God at the end of the age?' I will answer "Yes and no." I want to explain that as we work our way through this text. I'd like to get us all on the same page here in the book of James.

The book of James is a very tightly woven wisdom book. There are number of wisdom books in the Old Testament and there is one wisdom book in the New Testament that is written by a pastor by the name of James. James pastored a mega-thousand church in Jerusalem. He was the half-brother of Jesus. He was converted after the resurrection and he writes the first book of the New Testament, James. It is the most quoted book in the New Testament and it is an astounding book. It is a book that takes the Gospel anticipated in the wisdom books of the Old Testament and the Gospel wisdom of how to live your life as he addressed professing believers and what it means to be a true believer. He does so by taking on the subjects up front.

In James 1 he informs us that the trials of life are not there by accident. They are not there by interruption. The theme that has been established for the book of James is the Gospel life is a life of persistent ministry and joyful maturation in a sin-cursed world informed by the God-sent gift of wisdom from above. In other words, 22 times James addresses 'my beloved brothers' meaning he is addressing those who profess to be a follower of Christ, a saving relationship with Christ. That means you have a Gospel foundation – a new heart, new record, new life, new family and a new home in Jesus Christ. That means you have a Gospel motivation for your life where the love of Christ constrains you. That means you have a Gospel life you want to live but to live that Gospel life you have to have Gospel wisdom.

You are living in a Genesis 3 world. You are not living in a Genesis 1 and 2 world. It is a sin-cursed world and in this world as a believer you will face everything in this world that unbelievers face, except for the condemning judgment of God. You will

face death, disappointment, closed jobs, failed businesses, trials of prosperity, adversity, of being married, of not being married, not having children, of having children, poverty, riches and all these trials in this sin-cursed world. To navigate through these trials you need Gospel wisdom. These trials are not accidents or interruptions in life for they are life.

These trials have been designed by God to do three things. One is to reveal to you the Gospel wisdom that you know. Every test tells you what you know. Two, every test tells you what you don't know and what you yet need to know. Thirdly, it will reveal any strongholds of idolatry that are still in your life that are to be uncovered, repented of and moved away from toward Christ and your trust in Him.

So far in our study of James we have uncovered three Gospel maxims and I will not go through those here for you can read these on the previous studies but here is the second thing we have learned from James 1. If I need Gospel wisdom I need to know how to get it and James gives us two instruments. One instrument is persistent, believing prayer for if you ask of God He gives it liberally. The second instrument is prioritized hearing and doing of God's Word. You are to be a hearer but not a hearer only which deceives yourself. Be a hearer and doer so that you not only hear God's Word but you carry God's Word with you into life.

What is the result of that? The result of that is true religion. I got a pamphlet this week from a church that said 'come to our church for we believe Jesus didn't come to start a religion but to have a relationship.' That is true and false. Jesus came to reveal that all manmade religions cannot get you to God. Christianity is not a manmade religion. It is a God-given relationship that leads to what James calls true religion, not a false manmade religion where you make God in your own image and how through arrogance think you can earn your way to God, but a glorious truth that the Gospel comes. God has come down in His Son to save you from your sins and now gives you a true religion, not a vain religion, a pure religion, not a false religion, and this is a religion that flows from your relationship with God which has three marks.

These three marks are found in James 1:26-28, what we have already read at the beginning. Mark number one is a bridled tongue. Mark number two is those who have been saved by grace will embrace public ministries of grace and mercy to the least, the last and the lost. In that day it would have been widows and orphans. In our day it would be to anyone we can reach with public ministries of grace and mercy. The third mark is you keep yourself unstained from the world which would be a personal commitment to Godliness and holiness of life that you might glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Now James takes on the trials of life. True religion and trial number one was in James 2. This is where two men walk into a sanctuary for worship. One is rich and one is poor. Those who go to the rich man and disdain the poor man have just revealed something in that trial. They love the glory of man and not the glory of God. So true religion has no place for discrimination, favoritism or partiality for all men are made in the image of God and all are objects of our public ministries of grace and mercy and all are objects and subjects of our love and truth in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. No such distinctions should be allowed and that we don't know those distinctions. We see that people are either saved or lost but they are made in the image of God and we are to go after them with the love and truth of Jesus Christ with compassions, humility, courage and conviction.

What about professing faith? In James 2 he gives the second test which has to do with true religion and saving faith. He says that you may profess faith but not have saving faith. There is a difference between being a mere professor of faith and being a possessor of faith. Those who possess saving faith will manifest it with a changed life. Our profession will be justified by our obedience. Our obedience does not save us. Jesus saves us by faith but if you have saving faith it's not only a redeeming grace that you have received but it is a transforming grace. In other words, if by faith you are rooted in Christ then by faith there will be fruit for Christ. Not all fruit will be the same – some 30 fold, some 60 fold, some 100 fold but there will be fruit if there is a root. So if there is a true professor of faith then there will be a true possessor of faith and that will leave evidence for the old has passed away and the new has become.

Now we come to trial number three and it's the toughest. With it being so tough we will take two studies to look at it – this one and the next. It has to do with the tongue. Let's take a look at what James says about the trial of true religion and the tongue. James 3:1-12 says *[1] Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. [2] For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. [3] If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. [4] Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. [5] So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.*

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! [6] And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. [7] For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, [8] but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. [9] With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. [10] From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. [11] Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? [12] Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

Here is what he is saying. This little member of your body, the tongue, will always do one of two things if you give it long enough. It will reveal what is in your heart. Jesus says that man speaks from what fills his heart. Let someone talk long enough and you'll find out what is in their heart. Secondly, what we say will direct our life. How many lies are the results of the first lie? How many decisions are made because of sinful speech? He is saying the heart is revealed in the tongue and the tongue begins to guide the life.

We have a number of Godly Christian counselors at Briarwood and whenever I talk with these therapists I watch something about their style that is so absolutely crucial in counselors. We have a lot of people going to Birmingham Theological Seminary for counseling. Whenever people talk to me about their calling to be a counselor I always tell them not to be a counselor just to do therapy on yourself. That is not why you should be a counselor. Secondly, you have to have a Christian world and life view. Don't integrate secular counseling into Christianity. You frame counseling from a Biblical

world and life view. Thirdly, is you have to be able to be quiet to be a counselor. That's why very few preachers and teachers are good counselors because they can't be quiet.

Here is what a therapist knows. If I get someone talking it's just a matter of time until they reveal their heart. So in our next study we'll learn how the tongue reveals the heart and how it directs the life. One of the marks of true religion was a bridled tongue and I just read a passage that says no one can tame the tongue. Do I have a contradiction here? If you could tame the tongue you could tame the rest of your life in Godliness but no man can tame the tongue. In the next study we'll see four marks of a tamed tongue, four marks of an untamed tongue and four word pictures of an unbridled tongue and what it does and four word pictures on how the tongue can be bridled.

For this study let's go back to James 3:1-2 which says *[1] Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. [2] For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.* James 3:1-2 is James' gateway verses for us to deal with taming the tongue. He uses the issues of teachers at a stricter judgment as a gateway to talk about the importance of a tongue. That is obvious because a teacher has to use a tongue and if a teacher has to use a tongue then the teacher becomes the issue for us to talk about taming the tongue but as I read it I realized that these verses have so much in them.

In fact, there are five things I want you to walk away with from James 3:1-2a in terms of this admonition but it's an admonition that has to be put in context. First he starts by saying let not many of you become teachers my brothers. He is saying two things here. He is saying that not many should be teachers but he is also saying that some of you should be. However I have another problem. In Hebrews 5 there is a confession of truth that says by this time all of you should be teachers but you're not. In James it says let not many become teachers and in Hebrews 5 it says for all to become teachers. All of us as believers are teachers with what we say and how we live. People are learning about our Savior from us. One might say 'I'll go witnessing' but you are always witnessing. Maybe you are a good one or maybe a bad one but you're always witnessing. You are always teaching. We should all be teachers but what is getting in the way is that we're still at milk. We have to get you from milk, to mush, to meat.

How do you get from milk, by knowing the right doctrine, to meat, in the Word? You get there by being trained with obedience. You have to be a hearer and a doer. That's what gets you a deeper grasp of God's Word. Then you all become teachers. The Bible says all should be teachers but it also says in Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12 that every believer has a spiritual gift and some people have the gift of teaching. All of us have the privilege and responsibility of generally teaching to observers who are Savior is by how we live and what we say but some have the gift of teaching.

Thirdly, this teaching is so important because to get wisdom you have to hear and you can't hear if you don't have a teacher. So there is not only the general gift of teaching, there is the spiritual special gift of teaching and then there is an office devoted to teaching called the office of elder. Elders have to be apt to teach. There is one group of elders, such as myself, who are teaching elders and it is so important that we are supported so that we can spend the time we ought to spend so that we're faithful and clear in what we are teaching from God's Word.

James is not saying let not many of you be general teachers but he is saying let not many of you think you have the gift of teaching but there are those with the gift of teaching. Then there are some we put in the office of teaching and support them. So let not many be there, get the right ones there and then that will help others engage in the general office of teaching. So if you get those with the gift of teaching, teaching and in the office of teaching and they are properly trained and prepared then their ministry will unleash the congregation as teachers and their maturing in the faith. That is what James is basically saying in this text.

Then James says that it is obvious that teaching is important therefore teachers have to answer before the Lord. It's not what every believer has to answer before their life before the Lord but teachers have it stricter because words matter and teaching will do something. Teaching will accomplish something. When all is said and done Jesus says the pupil is like their teacher so the teaching of the teachers is doing something to the pupils. Therefore the teacher not only has to give an account for his life but what he or she has deposited in the lives of others as well. I'm sure some of you reading this are paralyzed or discouraged or on the sidelines afraid of commitment because of false teaching and false teachers. Some of us perhaps are still trying to recover to get on board with what is true to God's Word because we had false teaching and false teachers. That's why teachers not only give an account but a stricter account.

What does this mean? I want to give you five takeaways to walk away with from here. The first was is that every believer will appear before the judgment seat of God at the end of the age. I want to give you several texts here. II Corinthians 5:10 says [10] *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.* In Matthew 25 after Jesus has been dealing with the ten virgins and their accountability says this. Matthew 25:31-46 says [31] *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. [32] Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. [33] And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. [34] Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. [35] For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, [36] I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ [37] Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? [38] And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? [39] And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ [40] And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’*

[41] *“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. [42] For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, [43] I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ [44] Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ [45] Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of*

the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ [46] And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Notice in this passage everyone is there at the judgment seat – the sheep and the goats. The point of this passage isn’t that you go visit prisons and give people food and drink to get saved. The point is that saved people are marked out by a changed life and the judgment seat will reveal it. Peter puts it this way in I Peter 2:12, *[12] Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*

Now let’s look at Revelation 20 and hear our Lord Jesus describes this moment. Revelation 20:11-15 says *[11] Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. [12] And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. [13] And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. [14] Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. [15] And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

Let me combine this with Matthew 25. Everyone is there at the great judgment. The sheep are those in the book of life and the goats are those who are in the books. Those who are in the books are then judged and the verdict is the wages of sin is death. It is eternal judgment away from the presence of God. You didn’t want Him in life, you don’t have Him in eternity and the torment of that is now inflicted with no revocation whatsoever. There is no parole, no appeal, for it is everlasting judgment.

So what is my hope in that day? My hope in that day is my name is not in those books. My name is in the book of life. All who are in the book of life are then brought in to glory. These are the ones who have put their trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. They have said ‘no’ to self and sin and the deception of this world. They have said ‘yes’ to a Savior that has loved you so much that He has come down from heaven, took your name out of the other books because the condemnation that was due to you He took on the cross. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus and by His blood He wrote you in the book of life. Please leave here today by faith and repentance in Christ knowing your name is in the book of life.

Why are we there? We are not there for the judgment of eternity for Jesus has settled that. There is no condemnation but we are there so that our imperfect life, for no one is perfect in and of themselves, but there will be a changed life and God not only gave you redeeming grace but He gave you transforming grace. Then we are also giving an account for those things that have been entrusted to us which is the judgment of stewardship. Beyond that stewardship, we are all there because we’re responsible for the life that we live and out of that come the rewards for heaven. We use the rewards for heaven to worship the Lord for all eternity.

Rewards are like a tip for a waiter or waitress. I despise going to a restaurant that says ‘gratuity included.’ If it says that then it’s not gratuity. You just took away my gratuity opportunity. The tip is you’re giving them affirmation for the service they gave to you which they could only do because you had employed them by buying the meal.

The only reason I'm going to have any rewards is because Jesus saved me, gave me the gifts and the abilities. The rewards are like God's way to say 'good job, well done.' Now we take that because it all came from Him to give it back to Him with glory.

Here is the second takeaway. Teachers will have a stricter judgment. This is because our words matter. People can't know Christ, can't believe in Christ without hearing the Word. They can't grow in Christ without hearing. Teaching is important and words matter. Dr. Barker, Pastor Harry Reeder, and the elders of a church have a stricter judgment than the rest who are there for their stewardship judgment. Anyone in a formal position of teaching has a greater responsibility because what we did, did something. It was either false teaching or true teaching but it had an effect because people become like their teachers. Bishop James (the author of the book of James) has to give a stricter account. The Apostle Paul will have to give a stricter account.

This is not for our salvation because Jesus has accomplished that but for our ministry. Teaching like leadership always works. What does it work? Good teaching produce good results and bad teaching produces bad results is the normal course. Teaching is big time important therefore it is big time responsible and therefore it is big time accountable.

The third takeaway is aspiring teachers must submit to personal assessment and intentional preparation or discipleship. It is not wrong to aspire. If God has gifted you or called you then aspire. Don't let this frighten you. This is what this ought to make you do. I'm not going to run with my twenty hymn books and twenty chairs to start my own church. I'm going to submit. I want to submit for people to assess me. Am I an elder? Am I a teacher? Am I a pastor? In I Timothy 3 there are 17 qualifications for the office of teacher and it says to let these first be tested. Don't let zeal send you too quickly. Let humility get married to the zeal and submit to being assess, prepared, properly disciple and tested as a teacher for your sake and for the sake of those who hear you.

If God has given you a gift then you have the ability and the responsibility to study and know the Word of God. Then you have the ability and responsibility to faithfully and clearly communicate that Word in truth and love. That doesn't just happen. You need to submit to discipling process and assessment. Twice a year I take a group of aspiring leaders to Gettysburg and we'll gather on a little spur on the hill at Little Round Top where Joshua Chamberlain, a Bible teacher who became a general in the Union Army who won the congressional medal of honor, arguably won the battle of Gettysburg, arguably winning the war and most people don't know that in 1862 when he joined he was given an assignment as a Colonel of the 20th Maine. He wrote the governor and said "I do appreciate this honor. I aspire to leadership but I am not properly trained. Would you please put me under a West Pointe trained Colonel, let me serve under him and if proven I will be glad to serve in the future." So he studied under a Colonel by the name of Adelbert Ames and Ames was promoted after the battle of Chancellorsville. So Gettysburg was Chamberlain's first assignment in command of the 20th Maine, having served as a Lieutenant Colonel.

On that day he performed two unbelievable fetes under fire on a rocky hill. Number one he refused the line to protect his flank under fire with very little ammunition and then when he was out of ammunition he did a right wheel bayonet charge that won the day at Little Round Top, arguably winning the battle that arguably wins a war. I would submit to you that he is not only a great leader but he was a man humble enough to

submit himself to be trained and tested first. That is why he was ready on that day. So if you are gifted you should aspire but aspire with the humility of assessment and preparation.

The fourth takeaway is faithful churches must assess and prepare aspiring teachers. So when someone comes and says ‘God has gifted me, called me and is moving me. I want to submit myself to assessment and preparation’ then the church needs to be ready. The Christian Ed department at Briarwood needs to be ready. Lead us in how to prepare and assess people who are moving into teaching roles in the church but I believe that every ministry of this church ought to be thinking about how to prepare and assess the future teachers and leaders in your ministry. How do you prepare and assess them? Make use of Christian Ed but how do you do it in concert with Christian Ed leading the way?

Here is my plea. I want us perhaps by God’s grace to be able to be a faithful church with not only this wonderful marketplace Fellow’s program but could we also have joined to it a pastoral Fellow’s program so we get people who are educated in the classroom and in life and they are assessed and prepare so when they go into the ministry they have already been beside someone who has taken their last breath before they are going into eternity. They have already shared the Gospel with people. They have already disciplined people. It’s not that they already have a diploma so they are coming into the ministry but they have been assessed and prepared in the classroom of life as well as the classroom of the academy.

The fifth takeaway is a closing word. Go back to James 3:1-12 and find the four marks of a tamed tongue and the four examples of an untamed tongue and look at the illustrations. You will see that no man can tame the tongue but in the next study you’ll find out how our tongues can be tamed. There is a way and it’s right there in that text. I have two concerns. One is that those of you who have heard me and God has given you a gift but you’re scared to death to pursue it now, the same God who gifted you will develop you, will sustain you and you will stumble for we all do, but God’s grace can cause you to grow in grace. So aspire and let’s develop you.

Secondly, there are some of you reading this that have been hurt by false teaching and false teachers. Some of them were false teachers with malevolent purposes to victimize you. Give them to Jesus. You may be so hurt that you are like those who have these dolls at home that you are sticking pins in because of what they have done to you. I have news for you. He is still controlling you but give him to Jesus for he has a judgment coming. It’s not you for Jesus will take care of that. Don’t let it paralyze you from seeking out true teachers because you need them to grow.

If all this is true, do you think maybe you ought to be praying for teachers and preachers? Do you think you have an investment in that? I plead with you for what we started in 2001 you will continue and that is for at least one meal a day pray for the preaching of God’s Word and the teaching of God’s Word and the leaders who oversee it in this church. All of us have got to give a stricter account. We are in need of your prayers. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for James’ marvelous succinct wisdom. Would You give this to us in our lives and in our

hearts? Father, there are some who are false teachers malevolently, there are some who are true teachers but teaching false teaching because they didn't take time to be prepared and assessed and then there are some where the church didn't take the time to prepare or assess. Lord, I want to thank You for Jesus who writes our name in the book of life, who is the Teacher by the Holy Spirit. Thank You for the gift and offices of teaching and that when properly administered all of us will become teachers of the Gospel in truth and love to a watching world. Father, bring the bridle of grace to our tongues and to the tongues of our teachers, I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.