

James
“Religious Talk, Spiritual Reality”
James 1:19-27

I wrote a book on James about 17 years ago, and for about ten weeks I'll be covering kind of half of that book because we're covering Book of James, this fall. I'm also working on a different book, and I'm so excited. I mean, I just I'm excited. I've never really studied in detail the book of I Corinthians. And so I'm going to share a portion of that tonight and in coming weeks. And we'll have other pastors sharing as well. We're going to look at the nature of a blessed church and a church that isn't so blessed at the service tonight studying I Corinthians 1.

But right now we're in James. I'm continuing with a series that I began about 11 months ago, when I was just visiting one Sunday. We covered half of James 1, and we're going to cover the rest of it right now. So, listen to God's Word as I read it to you. Beginning in verse 19.

Know this, my beloved brothers. Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, thereby deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hero of the word and not a doer, he's like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror, for he looks at himself and goes away, and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets, but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in what he does. If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Let's pray for a moment.

Lord, I pray that we would have ears to hear what you're saying to us, that we would indeed have true religion, as we show that we are hearers and doers because we trust you and you're changing us by your word. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Some years ago, I was a part of a mission trip to South America, and everybody on the trip was a pretty, pretty big group. We stayed in one house, so we got to know each other, ministering by day. But we would start the day with breakfast, and then we'd go out, minister all day and then come back and usually share a meal together at least a couple hours at night. And, there was one man who rose early every morning and would sit on the porch, read his Bible and pray. It was easy to see him there. And, one night I chatted with him and he said, you know, Dan, I'm so excited to go to bed at night because I'm that much closer to my morning devotions, my time in the word with the Lord. And I thought, I am clearly a spiritual dung beetle compared to this lion of the faith. I could never say such a thing about myself. Months later, we learned that our

spiritual lion had been sneaking out at night and going to bars and getting drunk and getting into fights and, committed crimes, sufficient crimes that he had been banned from that country for the rest of his life. So our spiritual lion was a giant hypocrite. He read the Bible, and somehow it didn't penetrate his spirit.

And of course, that's what's on James mind, that tragic situation of people who seem to be religious and fall far short. Now James gives us three signs or tokens or proofs, if you will, that someone's religious activity is genuine. The first one is control of one's tongue. The second one is caring for orphans and widows, which stands for all who are poor, all who have few connections and few allies caring for orphans and widows in their distress and staying unstained by the world. Those are the three signs. We'll look at them carefully. These are proofs that you don't just hear the word, or go to church, or read the Bible, or utter a prayer, but you are actually devoted to God because true faith manifests itself in a desire. And let me say it carefully. Substantial progress, not perfection, but substantial progress in actually obeying the Lord's Word. Now, when you want to obey the Lord's Word, many of you here will say, that's great. I've studied James, I love James. James is so full of counsel about how to follow God's will in fact, it has 107 verses and there are 59 commandments in those verses, and most of them are very clear. There's no doubt about what he's saying. And so when you read James and a lot of people here study James, at some point you think, this is great, I'm hearing God's will. I'm going to do what God says, and we're properly attracted to that. Activists who want to do something for God love the book of James. But James is also concerned with hypocrisy. He says the Word of God is like a mirror to your soul. And even as we look at a mirror most days when we get up, you get a shower and, you know, we fix our hair, we put on makeup or shave according to the requirements of the gender and our culture and we look and we see what we're like. And James says that's what it's like to read God's Word. It shows you what you're like. It shows you your flaws.

Now, this morning, I deliberately came to church with a button unbuttoned on my shirt. I like button down shirt. Don't ask me why, but I came. I'm popping it up because some of you are far away and you can't tell. But as I was saying goodbye to my wife this morning and I had it almost hidden like this, she said, you know your button. Now she you know, she guards me as best she can. It's a project to make sure that my pockets are not one in, one out and one half way and my ties straight and, you know, your button. And I said, yeah, I know it's on purpose. And I came into the building and the first person I saw said, hey, doctor, do your button. And then somebody else in the end, for the first six people said, hey, your button. I go, thank you. You're showing that you're watching. You're observant. You want to help me? Thank you. And so it makes it easier for me to tell you this. We noticed things like a button, but sometimes we miss the. We got flagrant sins going on in our lives. And James says it shouldn't be that way. The word should show us what really counts. And that is the status of our soul. So we look into the Word of God as a mirror and we should change. We gaze into it.

James is concerned that will gaze and listen or gaze and not listen, and he's very keen that we should understand that the word is our number one resource, human resource. Of course, the Holy Spirit is our first resource. But humanly speaking, he says, the word is going to help you. And in chapter one earlier he said, if any of you is in a trial and you need wisdom, you should ask God and He'll give you wisdom. And of course, we find God's wisdom above all in His Word. And then a little bit later, he says, you know, if we fail in a trial, that can prepare us to hear the word because we feel bad and and the word can help us get in the right path. But he says, you must receive the implanted word, which can save your souls. That is to say, don't just listen. Put it down like a plant, not like, not like, a mum that you put on top of your soil and keep it in the bucket. But a mum that you put in the soil so that it's going to last better. And we should be doers of the word, not hearers, because the word is effective. We should let it do its work. That's what he says at the end of chapter two. So we want to let the word do its work. James says everyone should be quick. Verse 19. We're going to pop it up there. There it is. Everyone should be quick to listen and slow to speak and slow to become angry, because the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Now we all, we all know this. We know that we get angry about things and we usually get angry about the wrong things. Right? So it's football season, and I know I've heard that some people here care about college football. And, you know, we get angry when a mediocre referee starts throwing laundry around and wipes out a 40 yard gain. What is wrong with that referee? And you know, it's just a game. Relax. Know that that referee should probably rot in hell forever for that for that holding call. Okay, you might be a little too angry about that. And then I mentioned something about drivers in the morning. And one of the pastors actually came up and said, Dan, I got a better way to say it. What really makes me angry, he said, is when somebody goes 48 miles an hour in the fast lane and the highway, man, does that make me mad. You know, that lane is not for people who are doing their personal best, is for people who are actually going fast. Would you please get out of that lane? And we get angry about things like that an injustice. And crass sin hardly moves us. We get angry about the wrong things. We know that's we know that's true. And anger. Anger does not help us. It's hard to go along with God when we can't get along with anybody. Angry people are often big talkers. Angry talk, angry talk. You don't learn much when you talk, James says. Be quick to listen, not be quick to talk or quick to talk. Sometimes you don't learn much when you talk, and you certainly rarely do learn anything while you're talking angrily about things. Anger does not give us godliness, so put away all filthiness, he says, and receive the implanted word. Now, the scriptures up there today, in part because I want you to notice something looks a little bit backwards to us.

In verse 21. You see that it says, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls. Now it looks backwards. If you know your theology, you know that God saves through His Word, and then we change, right? So the last part of it should be first. And the means of salvation is the word heard beforehand. And then of course, the word received after word that we follow. And that's what enables us to get rid of filth. And we think, James, you got it backwards. And I would say to you

that a in a strictly theological sense, maybe it's not the order we're used to, but James is speaking pastorally and pastorally speaking what he says here is actually the way it works. So very often, maybe even most of the time when somebody is an adult, is not a believer, is coming to faith. What happens is somebody looks at his or her life and they say, my life is not the way it should be. I don't like the way things are shaping up. I don't I'm not fond of the way I behave, but the people are. I'm not fond of the results either. And when people see that their life is in disarray, frequently they begin to reach out and they talk to a friend who may have a life that's in better shape. And that friend gives them maybe some moral advice that came from a book, perhaps a self-help book. But eventually they often run into a believer, and the believer says, you know, self self-help books have a lot of wisdom in them. But really, if you want to change your life, you actually need God in your life. And they you should start reading the Bible and maybe come to church with me or come to a Bible study with me. And that's the way it actually works. It actually works very, very often. People want to get rid of filth, and then they turn to the Word of God, and then the Word of God saves their whole souls.

That's the wisdom of the book of James. That's why it actually transpires. Of course, believers also want a pure life and a better life and want to get rid of wickedness. Oh, keep it there for a second. More. Go back. Thank you so much. They also want to keep it. And so we also want to implant the word deep in our hearts and put away filth.

Now there's a passage in Zechariah that I want to read to you for a moment. It's sick. Uriah chapter three, verses 1 to 4. And in that passage there is a man who has a filthy problem, filthy clothes. This is. This is what it says. Zechariah the prophet encounter someone, is giving him a vision, and this is a part of the vision. Then he showed me, Joshua, the high priest, standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. So Joshua is the high priest. He's representing God in the temple, and Satan's accusing him. And what's happening? Verse two.

And the Lord said to Satan, the Lord rebuke of Satan. The Lord has chosen Jerusalem. Who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you? Is not this a brand plucked from the fire? In other words, you know you have something to say against him, but I've plucked him from the fire. The Lord says, now Joshua, standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who are standing before him, remove the filthy garments from him.

And the saying, is this Joshua, the high priest is supposed to represent God in the temple was absolutely pure clothing, representing the purity of God and the purity we should bring. And he's completely ill prepared. He's dressed in filthy clothes and Satan saying he has no right to be there. God says, you're right, but I'm going to take the filthy clothes off him. Now, the New Testament comments and this many times it says we're clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and that's why we're righteous. This is the way the Old Testament says it. The Old Testament says you put away evil, but God does. First he changes your clothes. He gives birth to you by his word because nobody can simply put off all filthiness and rampant wickedness. The way we do it is when God saves us, and he does that when he plants His Word deep in our hearts. Paul says

this. Reflecting on what Jesus said, Paul summarizes what he learned from Christ. He says that in Ephesians four this way he says, God instruct us. The Lord instructs us to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life, is corrupt. Through deceitful desires. He renewed and be renewed in the spirit of your minds. Put off the old self, put on the new self, created after the likeness of God. You meet the Lord, you become more like him and act like it. And then he gives us some put off and put on statements, because you put on Christ, put off falsehood, and every one of you speak the truth to his neighbor and let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands so he may have something to share with those in need.

You put off the weight of sin you put on the new life because you've put on Christ, known to us through the implanted word that saves us. Now it also says in this verse, we should put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness. The word rampant here is a word that's used of vegetation that grows prolifically, whether you want it or not. The short word for that is weeds. Things that grow really fast when you wish they didn't. And he's using weeds as a metaphor for the sin that proliferates even when we wish it wouldn't proliferate. Have you ever tried to take care of your lawn yourself? If you had a lawn? I was one of those self-help, self-help lawn people for many years, and I decided one year the chickweed is out of hand. The dandelions are everywhere. Sedge is infiltrating the front yard. Bermuda grass is taking over the back. I need help. And so we called up the helpers and they sprayed chemicals on our yard. And, not a whole lot of good things happened. I called them up. I said, you know, I've invested vast sums. Not true, of course, vast sums in your care. And I need to tell you that my yard is very green this summer. The dandelions are particularly vibrant. And the crabgrass, I mean, you've done a fabulous job. I've got crabgrass is spreading out this far, and the Bermuda grass is sending out, it shoots everywhere. And the man said, yeah, it's been a bad year for weeds.

And I said, yes. And God's Word says it's always a bad year for weeds. It's always a bad year for sin. Sin is rampant. It proliferates. Our hope is to receive the implanted word. That's what enables us to remove sin. Now our battle in this is the Word of God which can save our souls. Not that the words save our souls, but the words point to Christ.

And I want you to notice that it is here a present tense is able to save your souls. It does not say the word saved your souls. It does not say the word will save your souls. It's talking about right now for good theologians and a lot of good late theologians in this church. Because of its wonderful teaching over the years, a good lay theologian knows that salvation is a past event, a present event, and a future event. It operates in all three time zones. Because in the past, Jesus came and at some point in our life past, unless you're unless you haven't decided to become a disciple yet, in which case it may be a future. But in the past, Jesus worked. He died. He rose. Heard about him and you became a Christian. In the future you will be saved. That is to say, your salvation is not complete today. There's too much. It's a missing awry and wrong headed and so forth. You're not saved fully. That's in the future. But James is talking now about the

present, about God's salvation working itself out today so that we actually become more like Christ, that we become more righteous.

Now this happens through the work of the Holy Spirit, who operates through the word to change us, to lead us to repentance, to change our ways. Now, it's not that the word is magical, or that the better the talk, the more people will come to Christ. I have to tell you that, pastors kind of marvel at the way people tell them about the way they came to faith. And I was in a group with Pastor Reeder for some years, and we would, from time to time, marvel at the things people would say to us. So if you preach in a big church, you're on the radio, write books or anything like that. People walk up to you from time to time and say what you said on one day changed my life. And then they say what you said and you think, well, that's true. That's a good statement, that's a good sentence, that's a good paragraph. But I don't think I said that. I mean, I guess I'm glad you're describing it to me, but, I don't know. Doesn't sound like me. And then they say, it's on the internet. I listen to it seven times. You said it, and then we go, okay, I guess I did. One time a woman said to me, I was thinking about taking my life, and then I heard your sermon, and it gave me hope. And I went back and I looked at my notes. The word hope was never there. I didn't talk about really. I hardly talked about hope at all. But there is something. There was something there that the Holy Spirit used. The word was implanted into this woman's soul, and every preacher and teacher knows this. This happens to all of us somehow. A word, a sentence, a random remark. Get them? Got them thinking. And they said yes, yes, God is speaking me today and I now belong to the Lord. It's God's work in planting the word. Now James goes on in verses 22 and following to tell us a little bit more about it, he says, you know, of course, what you have to do is not just hear the word, you have to hear it and do it. Be doers of the word. Not here is only because if you only hear it, you deceive yourselves. And the word deceive can be translated either deceive or defraud. The Greek word means each one on many occasions, and they both work. Because if you listen to the word and don't follow it, you say, well, I'm listening to God's Word, but if you don't do it, you're fooling yourself. And you're also defrauding yourself because you're robbing yourself of the renewed direction and hope that you can have if you actually follow God's Word. So don't fool yourself. James says, do the word. And again, it can be translated become a doer. Not just do it, but become a person who does the Word of God. And then we get an illustration, illustration of somebody who looks in the mirror and they see themselves. And I told you, you know, I look in the mirror and I put my little buttons on my little shirt, and how silly it would be if I left the house with my button like this. And my, my tie, you know, like this. And I knew and I walked around all day. Now it is silly, I have to tell you that, I had a when I was in seminary, there was a pastor, I had a pastor, and he had a very low level mentoring program with several seminarians who went to his church. And he gave us a talk one day that I'll never forget because it seemed both strange and necessary. Said, now, look, I hate to tell you this, but, you need to take a shower regularly and brush your teeth and just don't do stuff that makes that makes it hard for people to take you seriously, distract you, you know, like a clump of mustard on your face after lunch. People are just staring at you forever. Just wipe the mustard off right. So he gave us this talk and he said, in fact, my hair. And

if anybody you can see me diddling with something here, you probably can't tell what this is. This is a Bobby pin. Can you see the Bobby pin up there? No, you can't see it, but you can get some glint, maybe. And I brought this because I thought you wouldn't. So this is a clip. He said when my hair is unruly, hit a lot of hair and it was kind of big and wavy. He said, I'll put a barrette in my hair that I got from my daughter, and it's about, you know, it's like, yay, big, because I got to tame my hair down and I'll, I'll wear it as long as I need you to calm my hair down, okay? I'm storing that away. Weird talk, but I'll accept it. And, you know, a few weeks later, he says, okay, Dan, we're going to do a visit together. We're going to play pastor and intern. And when I met him, he had the silver barrette in his hair. And it wasn't a little one. It was big. It was like this. And I thought, okay, he's going to visit. We're going to visit a woman in a nursing home. And maybe her eyesight is poor. She won't notice. And I'm just a lowly intern. I'm 23 years old. I mean, he doesn't care what I think, so I'm going to spare him the embarrassment of saying to me, Dan, you're a lowly intern. I don't care what I look like in front of you. And that woman has poor eyesight, so I didn't say anything. And I found out a few days later that he had never taken that barrette under his hair. He had walked around and seen 200 plus people with a giant 14 year old girl barrette, in his hair the whole day.

You're supposed to laugh at this. This is funny.

He looked at the mirror and he saw. He saw himself put it in, never took it out. How silly is that? And how silly and actually harmful it is to see ourselves in the Word of God as a mirror. The Word of God is a mirror. It reveals our heart, our soul, what's happening in us, and just kind of glance at it and take no heed of what is revealed in that moment.

The Word of God is a mirror, discloses our sin. It discloses our need of repentance, discloses our need of God's grace, and we should take enough time. Now I get it as, in most of our stages of life, we're not exactly thrilled with what we see in the mirror. I get it, you know, you look in the mirror, you think a new blemish, hair changing to gray or falling out or wrinkle and it's all it's bad news. Unless you're 27. It's bad news most of the time. And so you don't want to look and take it seriously. But the Word of God is different. It shows you the blemishes so you can amend them by God's grace with his help, and live a more beautiful life. And so we should look and repent. We are careless. We're careless with our buttons and our barrettes, and we're careless with our reading of scripture. Sometimes. Sometimes we fall behind in our scripture reading plan. Right? And yet, 74 verses. No, you got 74 chapters to catch up. And so you just tear through the scriptures. I read my chapters, spend your time, slow down, hear what God has to say. Now what is what does the word do? It says here if you're a here and not a doer, you go away.

You forget what you look like in verse 25, then says something else that's important. It says that when you look into or gaze that could be translated, look carefully into the Word of God. You're going to see it's perfect and it's the law of liberty, law of liberty. Now people think, well, since one has a law, liberty, I mean, the law restrains us. It doesn't permit us. It says, don't do that and don't do that and don't do that, and you should do that. And we think, well, the law restrains.

And of course the law does restrain. The law tells us not to steal, not to lie, not to kill, not to be filled with anger and various other things. But the law also gives liberty. Let's just use truth telling. If you're a liar. Of course there's the chances are always really high that you're going to be caught number one. Or you have to try to remember what lie you told to whom. That's constricting. But I want to be positive. Truth telling in the family, for example, is marvelously liberating. Praise God my children were all very honest in our house and they're honest to this day. I said, look, truth is the coin of the realm. You get in trouble and you lie about it. You're in trouble. You tell it, you get in trouble, you do something wrong. You tell us about it, we're going to sort it out together. And I'm going to give you grace. Just tell us the truth and praise God, my children are truth tellers. They really were. I'm thankful for it my whole life. But let's just consider a family in which the kids don't tell the truth to mom and dad, and mom and dad can't trust. And so the boy or girl, she's, let's say 16 years old, 16.5, she says, dad, I'm going to get a little extra time in on soccer. I want to work on my whatever it is, I'm going to learn to kick a better knuckleball so the goalie can't tell what's coming. I'm going to work on it with my friends. Okay, great. And, and I'll be back at eight. I'll have supper with them afterward. I'll be back at eight. Wonderful. It's so liberating to know that when your child says, I'm going to play with my friends, serious practice, and then we'll eat. We'll be back at eight. But if you learn that your child actually isn't going to soccer practice is doing something else entirely, and it's coming back at 1030, it's terribly constraining for the relationships. It makes life so much harder on everybody. When children and parents aren't honest with each other right, the law gives liberty. It gives liberty to those who see it and live by it. They're doers. It will be blessed. We will be blessed and are doing. And that is so true. The ways of the Lord are blessed. Now he goes on to talk about religion, true religion. Religion is just pure and undefiled. And what he's driving on here, of course, is the problem. I mentioned at first, and that is that people make false claims of being disciples.

Sadly, at times he says, there are three ways you can tell somebody makes a true profession of faith or religion. They control their tongue. The care for the poor, the Bible, the poor are often described as widows and orphans or orphans and widows. They stand for everybody who's disadvantaged and staying unstained or unpolluted by the world. True religion controls the tongue. That's a theme in James. He pounds that he criticizes those who flatter, falsely and then humiliate the poor. Chapter two, verses three and four. He condemns careless speech that wishes people well. Oh, I be warmed and well-fed, they say to the poor person, but they never lift a finger. It's vain speech. Deplores the person in chapter three who praises God one minute, and then curses a man who's made in God's image. Next minute he chides those who slander and judge and condemn others. That's chapter four. Rebukes those who boast about what they're going to do when they don't even know what's going to happen tomorrow. So over and over, James says real religion controls the tongue. Tongue can do great evil or great good, and even relatively harmless things like when you say something like, I know what you're thinking, do you? Why would you say, I know what you're thinking? Why don't you say, I have a guess about what you're thinking? Or when somebody passes something on, you should help others

with their speech and they tell you something. It feels like a rumor. Or how would they know that? And you can say words like, are you sure? Are you sure that's true?

It doesn't sound right to me. are you sure you should be saying that to me? That seems like confidential information. We can use our tongues to help other people. Secondly, true religion visits orphans and widows in their distress. That's the pair in the Old Testament. The disadvantaged, the poor, the defenseless. The Bible says in the Old Testament, James is riffing on the Old Testament that God is a father to the fatherless and a defender of widows. He says, I am kind to the widow and the orphan, so you should be kind to the widow and the orphan. And it's real. Kindness is pure kindness, because if you do kindness to somebody is like you, or somebody prominent or well-placed or can do your favors, there's no real good in that. You're always thinking, I may get it back, but when you give to the poor and the needy, they can't give back. They're poor. So it's truly an act of love and an act of kindness. The Bible links this over, and you know, I don't talk about politics. I'm not. What I'm going to say next is not immigration policy. I'm just commenting on what the Bible says about what we do, not whether we should let people into our country and under what terms. But what should you do when you actually meet someone who's an outsider, an alien in the Bible's language, a stranger, an outsider, and the law of God? The Lord says, through Moses, the Lord defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt, and God took care of us when we were aliens and outside of his covenant people. And that's why you care for aliens. It's not immigration policy. It's what you do when you meet somebody because God cares for the neediest people. And real religion cares for people who are needy. And of course, by doing this, we also are unstained by the world, because the world is all protection. And I don't know what I can do for other people in their many other ways in which we can be friends with the world instead of friends with God.

To cite James 4. Now some of you are worried a little bit perhaps about the word religion, because for many of us, religion is sort of a pejorative word. It's its religion is what happens in a cathedral with magnificent stone buildings. And there's no gospel anymore. It's those cathedrals with nobody there anymore. Or Bono, the lead singer (and a believer) of U2, said religion is what's left when the Holy Spirit leaves the building. Religion is smells and bells and candles and robes and all the accouterments of religion are of faith, but not faith itself. That's what we say when we hear somebody say, my religion is my private concern. We think I do anyway. There's a good chance that our religion is no religion, and they don't want to talk about it because it doesn't exist. Religion, Isaiah says in one place honors God with the lips, but leaves the heart far from the Lord. That's Isaiah 29. And so we have this antipathy toward religion. But James actually says, I get that. But if religion is the show of faith, James says, yeah, we're worried about the show of faith when there's actually nothing there. But he says, James says I'm worried about the no show of faith. I'm worried about faith that doesn't show itself. Now, of course, we're concerned about a hypocritical show of faith, but faith should show up in the external world the way you speak. The way you relate to people who are poor and needy, the way you

find a path to resist cultural influences. Follow God's way. This is how this is how religion shows up. By the way, God gives us teaching about religion showing up. It's called the Lord's Supper and baptism and gathering for worship and singing together. The Lord wants our faith to show, so we should hear the word. We should do the word. We should become doers of the word. And at some point we say, yeah, you know what? I can't. I'm not doing that very well. Book of James humbles us.

So this week of course I although I spoke on James before, but it's a new sermon I reviewed and I thought, you know, probably most people would say I'm pretty good at one of these three sides of true religion and pretty bad at one. And maybe, okay, add another one and okay, I was ready to say that to all of you. And I think, okay, which one of my bad at. Well, there's a saying that always frightens me. It's in James chapter three about the challenge of being a public speaker and a teacher, someone who's opinion is respected. James says not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness, for we all stumble in many ways, all stumble in many ways.

And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man. Well, nobody's perfect. And so that means I stumble and what I say. And so I did a review of my last two weeks of speech, and I remembered to my pain and sorrow that I, I failed to listen to what something important that somebody told me that paid attention to the wrong parts of a conversation and completely forgot what he said and misrepresented as a consequence, and caused significant trouble.

Because I forgot something. And I'm going to say Culpably forgot and there was a definite occasion when I should have spoken up about something and I didn't. And there were 2 or 3 times when something very troubling happened, and I should have exercise restraint. And I didn't. I sinned with my mouth speaking and also, unfortunately, not speaking. And so I erred. And maybe you would say, yeah, that's me too. Or maybe, maybe you're really good at controlling your tongue, but, you know, in your heart of hearts you're kind of hard, hard hearted toward people who are needy. You don't want to be bothered, just blow them off. Or if you examined yourself carefully, you would say, the world is all over me. I am so influenced by factors in my culture, and I know it, and I see it, and I don't break with it.

So what does James have to say for us? James never mentions the cross, never says justified by faith, but the gospels there, and this is the way he says it. He says God is in chapter four, verses 6 to 10, he says God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. So if you're humbled by the self-examination of your status as a demonstrative person showing your true religion, if you say, I've fallen short and you're humbled by that, then good, you're moving in the right direction. God gives grace to the humble. He says, draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your heart. You double minded. Grieve, mourn, and wail. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. And then he says it again, humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Now we know how to humble ourselves before Lord. We repent. We say, Lord, I want to heed your word, and I don't. I fall short or I've never even once in my life confessed honestly that I'm just not the person that I pretend to be. I'm not even close. And so I humble myself. Before you don't. You got to thread a needle, folks.

Here's where you thread the needle. You don't say, hey, I did wrong, everybody does wrong and ignore it. Excuse it because everybody's nobody's perfect. Just don't take it seriously. That's one mistake. The second mistake is to wallow in self-recrimination. You thread the needle, you're seriously grieving the evil you do the failures in your life, and you have hope. Both, because you know that if you humble yourself before the Lord, he will lift you up. He will forgive you. He will call you his child, his son, his daughter. He will cover your sins. He will set you back on the right path. That's my prayer for all of you.

Let's pray.

Heavenly father, I do pray that you would grant all of us together a desire to have and to show true religion where we do fall short. And even as Joshua the High priest was accused by Satan, we can be accused and we can accuse ourselves. And so, Lord, on the one hand, we want to be truly intent upon demonstrating that our religion, our faith, is real and at the same time, we want to remain humble before you and ask you in the gospel, in the work of Christ, to lift us up.

So we pray in Jesus name,

Amen.