**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Draw Near to God - For Greater Grace**

**James 4:8**

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(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted.)

 Today, our sermon is based in the New Testament book of James. I suggest that anyone who has the false understanding that Jesus, James, Paul or any of the New Testament writers held back making judgements upon people within the church. . . need to take into account the words God directed James to write. Oftentimes, people will quote Matthew 7:1 out-of-context. "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. These out-of-context opinions fail to read the next verse. 2 "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. I, for one, want to be measured by my faith and not by my works which will always come up short. Remember the Books of Deeds in Revelation 20:12 where people who chose to be judged by their deeds receive eternal judgement. In Matthew 7 and 23, Jesus is aiming to get the attention of the legalistic Jewish crowd, particularly the religious leaders who constantly judged the common person by the strictest letter of the Law.

**Matthew 23:1** Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples,

 2 saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses;

 3 therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.

 4 "They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.

 **. . .**

 23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

 24 "You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

 25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence.

 **. . .**

 27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

 28 "So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

From these words of Jesus, we see that He is judging the religious leaders and seeking to gain the attention of the common man. Jesus’ message is a call for a change of heart (Spiritual Rebirth: John 3) that will then regenerate a person giving them the ability to do the work God has planned for them to do (Ephesians 2:8-10). Therefore, “faith” comes first and automatically produces good works. Jesus also said that a person is known by their fruit.

**Matthew 7:16-20**

16 "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?

 17 "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.

 18 "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.

 19 "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

 20 "So then, you will know them by their fruits.

Therefore, it is not your self-generated good works that saves you but the good works the Believer does is generated by God’s Holy Spirit at work in a person who is already reborn (saved). And, the Believer does not have to continue saving themselves by self-generating good works. *In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise* (Ephesians 1:13).

 This is why James writes. . .

Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;

 (James. 2:17-22)

**Focusing on James 4**

The book of James was written by the half brother of Jesus, both having the same biological mother, (Mary). James (James the Just) did not accept Jesus as the Messiah during His ministry years. However, something miraculous happened. . .the Resurrection. James eventually became the leader of the church in Jerusalem and presided over the Jerusalem Council chronicled in Acts 15 (49 A.D.). Historians date James writing his letter between 45–48 A.D. James was martyred no later than 69 A.D. by being stoned to death by the Pharisees on order of the High Priest Ananus ben Ananus.

Again, remember that James is known by his recipients to be the head Elder/Pastor of the church in Jerusalem. He has very high spiritual standing and reputation. Therefore, he writes with loving authority that is accepted. This is evident in the fact that his letter is circulated throughout the diaspora and became part of the New Testament. James begins his letter announcing that he is a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance (James 1:1-3)

 From this positive uplifting introduction, we see by reading further down in the letter that James holds the Believers he writes accountable for bad behavior. His tone changes to one of a scolding father. We need to realize that James writes to people who are transitioning into being a follower of Jesus. It is obvious from the content of James’ letter that his audience is in need of practicing the Lord’s commands. We need to remember that by the time of James’ writing, many of the New Testament letters (books) had not been written. So, there was not this body of instruction circulating around like we have today with the twenty-seven books of a completed New Testament.

Note, that our audience today is a mirror image of James’ audience two-thousand years ago. Fallen human nature has not changed. It is one thing to agree to who God is as Jesus the Christ and another to humble yourself to living the life He has called us. We all see that the fallen world likes the positive message of Jesus but then resists or refuses to give-up their self-centered desires. Many people seek to put on the coat of Jesus with His name embroidered across the back but do not want to give up their secular lifestyle. So, many people claim they love Jesus? But to them. . . love is a one-way street with no accountability to God. Basically, they have and “open marriage”.

**John 14:15** "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

**John 14:21** "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."

**John 15:10** "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

**Proverbs 7:1** My son, keep my words and treasure my commandments within you.

2 Keep my commandments and live, And my teaching as the apple of your eye.

3 Bind them on your fingers; Write them on the tablet of your heart.

**Psalm 119:114** You are my hiding place and my shield; I wait for Your word.

115 Depart from me, evildoers, That I may observe the commandments of my God.

**Jude 1:3** Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. 4 For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

So, James understands fallen human nature and the source of sin. He is blunt in his questions to his recipients.

**Source of Sin?**

**James 4**

1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?

 Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?

 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.

 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

 4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?

Well. . .if I walked into a church and soon identified the problems James addressed, I would run out the door as soon as possible.

Quarrel, conflicts, war between members, lust, murder, envious, fighting, wrong motives, pleasure seeking, do not pray to God for needs, adulterers, friends with the world and hostile/enemy towards God, double-minded.

**What is the remedy James teaches for their spiritual failures?**

 **People need to make a choice!**

**Worldly friends or friends with God and His Indwelling Spirit?**

Verse 4 cont. Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

 5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose:

"He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"?

 6 But He gives a greater **grace.**

Therefore, it says,

"GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES **GRACE** TO THE HUMBLE."

**Resist the Devil? How? Submit and draw near to God.**

7 Submit therefore to God.

Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

9 Be miserable and mourn and weep;

let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom.

**Do not boast about yourself, but let the Lord exalt you.**

**Do not elevate yourself by criticizing others.**

10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.`

 **11** Do not speak against one another, brethren.

He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother,

speaks against the law and judges the law;

but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it.

[In other words, do not have a critical spirit. This does not negate

 the responsibility to speak out if the moral law of God is broken

such as adultery as James points out in verse 4.]

 **12** There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy;

but who are you who judge your neighbor?

**13** Come now, you who say,

"Today or tomorrow, we will go to such and such a city,

and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit."

 **14** Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow.

You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

 **15** Instead, you ought to say,

 "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."

 **16** But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.

 **17** **Therefore,** to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it,

to him it is sin.

In summation. . . in order to overcome the fallen world means humbly submitting to God and He will come closer to you. Our close relationship with God is sealed by His Holy Spirit.

**Ephesians 1:13** In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,

And then your hands can be cleansed and your heart purified. Then you will be able to resist the devil. The product of humility to God is to mourn for your wrong behavior and be tearful for what you have done. Jesus, God in the flesh, teaches this in the first two Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3,4).

 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

 4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

 Referring back to last week’s sermon, we see the application of Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth identifying God’s Holy Spirit as the power and authority over sin and death to be at work in Believers.

 **2 Corinthian’s 5:5** Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God,

 who gave to us the **Spirit as a pledge**.

 James writes to a very broad audience, being identified as the twelve [Jewish] tribes who are dispersed abroad. James is writing for God and reaches out to fellow Jews who have misunderstood the application of the Law. It is obvious they are living lives that are not consistent with God’s desire for them. Like Paul, James points to God’s Spirit that can guide them and empower them to live the life God has planned for them.

**James 4:5-6** 5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose:

"He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"?

 6 But He gives a greater grace.

God’s great love reaches out to us from the Cross and proclaims, *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). And, with this declaration, God intends to assist us, the humble, while we navigate life in this fallen world. Like those Jews in Acts 2, whose hearts were cut. . . God does not leave them there in their contrite, defeated condition. No. He gives them (us Believers) the ability to repent and turn from their past lives. Without a person surrendering to God’s Holy Spirit conviction, they will not have the ability to turn (repent) from their practiced life of sin. Due to their cut heart condition, they then have **access** to Jesus’ propitiatory/atoning sacrifice on the Cross. And then Believers are empowered to practice the moral life Jesus calls us. Jesus said that if you love Me, you will keep my commandments. (John 14:15, 23-24; 15:10.)

This is the Message, the Good News from Scripture, that God does not intend for us to navigate through this very challenging fallen world on our own. God tells us in Matthew 5:48 that we are to be “perfect”. How is this possible? Oh. . . God pledges to Believers the free gift of His Spirit. Again, we see this in John 20:20, when Jesus breathes His Holy Spirit into the Disciples in a way that highlights His overcoming power and authority being transferred to them. This is a one-time, God-in-the-Flesh revealing His intention and ability to indwell a person. When a person surrenders to the conviction of the Holy Spirit (John16:8 / cut heart Acts 2:37, Deuteronomy 30:6) and is born-again spiritually (John 3:16), they receive the gift of God’s Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). A person then is empowered to repent (turn) from their former sinful and intentional practiced way of life. From that point, a person matures (sanctification) seeking to be the person God has planned for them to be. This maturing process is a life-long experience.

It is obvious that James writes to people who have agreed to be a follower of Jesus but they had not surrendered their heart to Him which would afford them the ability to house God’s Holy Spirit in their heart.

Understanding. . .that God, speaking through James, did not call the Jews in the diaspora to live a life separate from the fallen world on their own. . . is a life-saving peace of mind to all of us. Many people report that they cannot be a Christian, because they cannot live the Christian life. But then, they do not understand that God does not expect us to live the life He calls us without His indwelling Helper. . . His Holy Spirit.

**2 Corinthians 5:6,7 6** Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we

are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord--

 **7** **for we walk by faith, not by sight—**

**James 4: 5** Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose:

 "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"?

**AMEN**

**“Helper” Scriptures:**

**John 14:16-17**

16 "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;

17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.

 **. . .**

 26 "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

**John 15:26 - 27**

26 "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, 27 and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

**John 16:7**

 "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.