

Sermon Notes – September 26, 2021
(James 5:13-20)

I haven't preached from the book of James in a long time, and what I need you to recognize about the book of James is that he's very different from the Apostle Paul. He's very different from John, who wrote John's Gospel and Revelations. The Apostle Paul is more steeped in theology and doctrine. James seems to be plain like a shoe, doesn't he? – just telling us how it is. I would call James, “the book of practical Christianity.”

The scholar Martin Luther called the book of James, “the Strawy Epistle” – “the Strawy Letter.” He doesn't include church doctrine; he doesn't talk about Jesus' miracles; he doesn't talk about Jesus' death and incarnation. In fact, James wants you to think about how to live out the Christian faith – about what happens from the time you accept Christ and are baptized until Christ calls you home. How do you live “in between”? ***He wants you to show evidence of your faith in Christ by the way you live.***

Several years ago, when I first went to South Florida and worked at the Congregational Church there, there were many New Englanders there and Mid-Westerners. Every Sunday when they came out the door and shook my hand, they would say, “Ms. Peggy, say something else. We like that southern accent.” You see, it was obvious that I was a Southerner and they loved that accent because it was so different from their own.

What the Apostle James is saying is: Think about how you live your life every day. Faith should be shown in our attitudes, our speech, and our actions. I want to give you a synopsis – a little bit of the whole book of James and then talk about these few verses. James was one who said, “Don't just talk-the-talk, you need to walk-the-walk.” He said, “Be doers of the Word and not hearers of the Word only.” He said, “Think about how you treat the widows and the orphans; how you care for the poor. Do you treat the rich different from the poor?” He said, “We shouldn't show favoritism to the rich and then be apathetic and indifferent to the poor.” He said, “God always prefers mercy over judgment.” How many

times do we judge people rather than be merciful and compassionate and understanding?

James talks about being doers of the Word and that's a part of what this lesson is about today. ***He wants us to show our faith in Christ by the way that we live - through our speech, our actions, and our attitude.*** James, in one part, (I think in chapter 2 or 3), talks about our tongue. He said, "How many times do we use our tongues to slander people, gossip, and lie rather than build people up and honor God?" He wants us to be real and show our faith every day. *I want to say that I believe that our relationship with God is not just about the destination of eternity in heaven, but God's also concerned about the journey in between - how we live from the time we made a decision to follow him until he calls us home, and how do we live in that process. God is concerned about how we live in that process; that process and that journey is important.*

Life is full of ups and downs and it's a journey. Our faith is to be an integral part of that journey and help us deal with all those things that we face in life. James, in essence, tells us that our faith should be evident in the way we deal with the temptations, trials, and hardships that come into our life. When we're suffering and having a difficult time, do we trust God? Do we pray to God? Is he our first resort or our last resort? Do we pray and then keep doing what we know to do, or do we do everything we know (in our own power) and then when nothing else is working, we turn to God? James says we ought to pray and go to God first.

Is any of you in trouble? Is any of you suffering? ... Pray. Pray for one another. In Psalms in the Old Testament, David the Psalmist says, "Call unto me and I will rescue you and you will honor me." He also says in Psalm 46:1 -- "God is our strength and refuge, a very present help in the time of trouble." God is always there, ready to help us, but he wants us to pray and call on him. James asked, "Are any of you sick? Then pray for one another. Call the Elders, call your Christian friends and ask them to pray for you." Have you ever noticed that there's strength in people praying for the same thing? There's power in it. There's strength to go

on and to carry on. Have you ever had to carry a heavy burden and you didn't think you could make it past it -- but, you had other people praying for you and it gave you the strength to get through it?

I heard a true story by Dr. Elton Trueblood who was a Quaker Minister. He served as a Chaplain at Harvard and Stanford Universities. He was also a book author and a theologian. He died in 1994. In one of his books, he tells the story about driving to a speaking engagement. He said, "I was driving along the road and I saw this elderly man and two young guys trying to push a car off the side of the road. It was disabled. They were having trouble getting it off the side of the road. I debated on whether to stop and help them because I'm on the way to this speaking engagement. I knew I'd have to change clothes again if I got out in the rain and the mud. I passed by them at first, but I guess my compassionate side got the best of me. I turned around, went back, pulled off the side of the road, and got out to help them. The elderly gentleman got into the driver's seat and the two young guys and myself pushed that car and got it off unto the side of the road. The elderly man got out, came over, and said, 'Sir, I just want to thank you for coming by today. You know, you had just enough strength, added to ours, to move this thing.'" Elton Trueblood said, "I got back in my car and I thought about that. There are a lot of people that carry a heavy burden and they need somebody else's strength, added to theirs to get through it sometimes. I remembered what that man said, 'You have just enough strength added to ours to move that thing.'" **Sometimes that's what we need for each other, and that is what James is saying to us. We are to care for each other, pray for each other, help lift up each other.**

James goes on to say, "If anybody has sinned, confess it to one another. Pray for one another." Most of us have a hard time confessing our sins to anybody, other than God. I remember taking the youth group on a mission trip to Savannah, Georgia. I took the youth group to the Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist. It was a huge Catholic Church in downtown Savannah. We went in for worship and afterwards, we took a tour of the Cathedral. We passed a confessional booth and Cody Carpenter said, "Ms. Peggy, what do they do in there?" I said, "They go in

and confess their sins to the Father.” He said, “I’m not going in there and confessing my sins!” Isn’t that the way most of us feel? We don’t want to tell anybody when we’ve done something wrong, do we? But, God says to confess to one another and to him. I don’t know a group who does a better job of that than AA (Alcoholics Anonymous). Many people who have a drinking problem, have a lot of repressed guilt and shame about things that have happened in their life - or things they’ve done. Many times they have this compulsion to keep drinking. In AA, they encourage them to evaluate their own life - examine their life - and if you’ve hurt anybody, go back and make amends. Go tell them that you are sorry and make amends. They also have a sponsor - somebody to hold them accountable when they feel weak. Sometimes, I think, in church, we need that, too -- that’s the advantage of having small groups in church because we can talk to each other, get closer to each other, share things, and pray for one another.

James goes on in that chapter to say, “If you know that a brother or sister has wandered from the faith, (wandered away from God and the church), we should have concern for them.” Now, most of us tend not to want to confront people because we don’t want to get into that. We don’t want to hurt somebody’s feelings. But, what the Apostle James says is that we are to care about that person and pray for them. There may be a time that God gives us the opportunity to say something at the right time, and we have to be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit of God to know when to say something and pray that it’s the right thing. He says we should always pray for and be concerned for them. I want to encourage us - you and me - that we need to be concerned with those who have fallen by the wayside.

James is saying that we need to live out our faith and show it by the way we live. My speech was evident to those people from New England and the mid-West. ***I wonder when people look at us -- is there evidence in our lives that we are followers of Jesus Christ - in our speech, our attitudes, our actions?*** I think that Jesus is just as concerned about our journey of faith and how we live everyday as he is the destination. He’s interested in how we live every day right now. Is our speech pleasing? Is

our attitude? Are we those who are overcoming prejudice? Are we dealing with inequality and injustice? Are we learning to control our temper and our anger? Are we building others up or tearing others down? Are we walking the walk and not just talking the talk?

James wants us think about how we practically live out our Christian life. He's not so theological; he's not so theoretical; but, there's a place for him in the scriptures and in our lives to live for Jesus. May our lives show evidence of our faith in Him. God bless you. Amen.