

# Proof of Eternal Life

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, everybody. It's always a pleasure to be able to bring God's word to serve His people.

! I thought long and hard about how to begin this morning.

! After some soul-searching, I thought I'd begin with a confession. It's a simple confession, and it goes like this. I like pie.

I don't just like pie. I love pie to a fault. And let me just explain to you how much I like pie.

Last year, I got very serious about jogging. I took up jogging. And so over the course of the last nine months of last year, I ran more than 300 miles.

[ 1 : 01 ] That sounded impressive to me. Despite running over 300 miles last year, I still have a very prominent stomach that pokes out in front of me.

I mean, everywhere I go, it gets there before me. That's how much I like pie. But it's not just pie. It's almost any sweet that you can imagine.

And guava duff, I adore guava duff. So unlike my brother Tim, who last week told you how much he loathes guava duff, I love it.

I love it. If you have guava duff, I will take Tim's portion. I have never met a duff I did not like. And I don't discriminate. It could be raisin duff.

It could be coconut duff. It could be guava. I don't care. It's all duff to me. I will eat it all. So I love desserts. I think you got that point. But the thing about desserts is they can actually be disappointing sometimes in the right circumstances.

[ 2 : 08 ] Let's take a pie, for example. Sometimes you see a pie and it looks amazing. It has a great color. It's bright. It's vibrant. It has a great smell.

But how do you know that the pie that you're looking at is as good as it seems to be? Ah, yeah. We got brilliant people here.

People with college degrees and such. Yes, that's an old adage, an old cliché now. But it's true. It says the proof of the pudding, or in this case, the proof of the pie, is in the eating.

You have to put the pie to the test. You have to taste it. Taste and see if what is in front of you is as good as it seems.

And so that's what we've come to this morning in our James series. In our study of James, James is showing us this morning a test of genuine faith.

[ 3 : 09 ] He's saying that just like the proof of the pie is in the eating, the proof of our faith is in the doing. He is saying that our actions can show proof of our eternal life.

So let's look at the text. James 1, 19, verses 25. And we are reading from the English Standard Version. The English Standard Version. The English Standard Version.

The English Standard Version. The English Standard Version. Know this, my beloved brothers. Let every person 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 harriers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a harer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in the mirror.

[ 4 : 23 ] 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 harer who forgets, but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Let's pray together. Lord God and Father, we come to you and we have bowed hearts, humble hearts. We ask you, Lord, to make clear your scriptures.

We ask you, Lord, to allow us to hear you speak to us. We ask you, Lord, to give us pliable hearts that we may receive. Lord, we pray that hearts will be touched not only to hear, but to do as they

hear.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. So this morning I hope to show how James demonstrates to us that our actions can give proof that we receive God's righteousness.

Essentially, you can say it's a sort of proof of salvation. And I want to organize our study this morning on the two main points. One, we are naturally unrighteous.

[ 5 : 49 ] And two, God is the source of righteousness. So first we look at, we are naturally unrighteous. Our text begins with James wanting us to be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

And you have to ask yourself immediately, why does he do that? Well, the simple answer is that we generally do the opposite. We are quick to speak, we are slow to listen, we get angry very quickly. We want people to know our opinions, so we speak very quickly. We want them to know our concerns, we want them to know our opinions. And as far as we're concerned, our opinion is fact. And all these things are evidences of our fallen nature. The fact that by nature we are unrighteous men and unrighteous women. We do not have a perfect integrity of character, nor do we exhibit faultless behavior.

So by putting out these flaws, James is actually putting out to us expressions of our pride. So pride is when we make life or moments in life all about us.

[ 7 : 08 ] We elevate ourselves, our opinions, our needs and desires above everyone else's. Now I know in your Bibles, you see just before verse 19 a heading.

Most of you might have something like that that separates it from the rest of the scriptures. But I want to not just look at the text we read this morning, but I think in order to make this point very clear about pride in our lives, we should also just take a step back of what we read last week. I just want to go over again two verses, verses 17 and verse 18, to make this point about pride in our lives. And this is how the verses read.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

Of his own will, he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

[ 8 : 23 ] So we are reminded here that God gives good gifts, and that our salvation is one of those perfect gifts. It says that this gift is of God's own doing.

So by extension of reasoning, it is not of our doing. We can't claim any type of responsibility for it. And if it's not our doing, then we have no reason to boast.

We have no reason to show pride. Yet despite all of that, in the very next verse, in verse 19, James is hitting us with blunt reality.

He is showing us that despite us not having any reason for pride, we are always showing expressions of pride in our lives. So I think if we are being honest, we would say that James is telling the truth about us in general.

In general, we are eager to speak, we are eager to give our side of things. But on the other hand, we are very, very reluctant to listen. And as I was preparing this, I recall just speaking very recently to a man who unfortunately was divorced.

[ 9 : 42 ] And he shared with me that while they were going through the divorce, he sat down with his wife. And he wanted to know just where things went wrong. And he said she looked him dead in the eye, and she explained to him, If only you had listened to everything I said, and done everything I said, he would still be married today.

So she was pointing out to him that he wasn't listening. But the ironic thing is that at the same time, she was confessing that she herself was not listening to him.

And that she wanted everything her way in the relationship. And it's not just confined this type of behavior to a married couple or that particular married couple.

We all do it. We do it in all sorts of relationships. We love people to listen to us and to do things our way.

Now, if we are even more honest, we would admit that we don't just do that to people. But that type of self-centeredness, we also direct towards God and the things of God.

[ 11 : 01 ] Even while sitting and listening to God's word, we sometimes offer resistance to it. Someone could be sitting down, the message of God is coming to them.

And even while they are hearing the word of God, they are not quick to hear. In fact, they are quick to speak. Because they could be, as the word is preached, formulating in their mind a rebuttal to what they are hearing.

And that's the issue with those who reject God's word as absolute truth. They have their own opinion. They want to stick to that opinion.

So they refuse to accept God's truth. And that's when we have people say they're living their truth. That's a very common phrase today.

People want to be in their truth and my truth. But the fact is, God is the source and the author of truth. He is truth.

[ 12 : 06 ] So due to our sinful, unrighteous nature, we all want to be masters of our own lives. We don't want to yield to the authority of God.

And we definitely don't want to hear what another man or woman has to say. We want to do things our way. So when we can't make up the CR point, when we can't have our own way, what happens?

We get angry. It's as simple as that. We're not as complicated as we think. And when we get angry, we lash out. Now, I have to give another confession here.

This is a more serious confession. And that is, I've done that. I have lashed out in anger. Not once, more than once, many times.

And the truth is, I have always regretted doing that. Each and every time. See, the truth is, when we react that way, we're reacting out of our fallen nature.

[ 13 : 11 ] And because we are unrighteous beings, what comes out of us at those moments are usually unrighteous actions, unrighteous words. So the scripture warns us to keep our tempers in check.

James says, therefore, the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Our anger hurts.

Our anger damages. Our anger destroys. And we have so many examples of this in scripture. And right away, I'm sure everyone's mind goes to Cain and Abel.

You know that Cain was angry. He rose up. And he killed Abel. And this is why Christ himself warns us to watch out for our anger.

Because as unrighteous beings, our anger can quickly turn to murder. And that's an example of being angry with another man.

[ 14 : 18 ] But we also have scriptural examples of us being angry with God, lest we think that this is just confined to unbelievers. Believers themselves sometimes have issues with God.

We can look at Jonah, for example. God chose to spare Nineveh. Jonah didn't agree. He had his own opinion. He got angry. He even tried to flee from the presence of God.

So in just two verses, getting back to James, James sums up instances like these. Very quickly, very cleanly, very efficiently, he lets us know, hey, in a nutshell, you're a prideful, unrighteous being. You don't listen. You're eager to speak. You have to have things our way. We get angry. Very everyday things that he shows us, that demonstrates to us how far we are in our fallenness.

But the good news is James does not just hit us with doom and gloom. He does not just say you're unrighteous and he leaves it there. He's very truthful about our condition.

[ 15 : 41 ] But he also turns us toward hope. And to see that, we'll focus on our second point, which is God is the source of righteousness.

So in turning us toward hope, James directs our attention to where righteousness resides. So tucked in there at the end of verse 20, James confirms to us that God is the one who is righteous. So we know because of that, if we are looking for righteousness, we have to look to God and not into ourselves. I don't want to go far off track here.

I had a lot of things that I wanted to include in here, but I'm mindful of our time. But I think it's worth mentioning this point. God is the righteous one because he's the only one who has perfect character, perfect integrity, and displays faultless behavior.

But yet, in the fact of all that, in the face of all that, we can all relate when we read the psalmist. The psalmist declares that God himself is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

[ 17 : 06 ] Now, I'm not saying that every time you get angry, it's a sin. Because Paul tells us in Ephesians 4 that it's possible for us to get angry and not go into sin.

What I'm saying is, if we see the true righteous being, the sovereign creator and sustainer of the universe, the only one who is truly righteous, keeping his anger in check, not easily allowing himself to go into anger, how much more should we, as unrighteous, sinful beings, do that same thing? Anger really belongs to God himself and not to us. But that's just a quick aside. Getting back to the text, James points us towards hope by telling us where righteousness resides.

Firstly, and secondly, in verse 21, he tells us how to receive and how we display the righteousness of God. So James instructs us to do three things in verse 21.

And I want to go through those three, but I want to do it in a different order than James gives it, because I think it gives us a clearer sense of what happens the way James puts it.

[ 18 : 34 ] He says, and this is the third thing, he says, receive with meekness the implanted word. Okay, receive with meekness the implanted word.

That's what he tells us to do in verse 21. I want to start there, because this is actually the making of the believer. James lets us know that receiving the word is what leads to the salvation of our souls. The word must be planted in us. It must take root in our hearts. And that is the gospel. We must believe it. So we must believe that Christ is the eternal word who became flesh, who came to earth, dwelt among us, lived a sinless life, took our sins on his back.

He suffered for us. He died for us, who God has given him. And by the power of God, he was raised again. We have to believe and receive that.

We have to have a hope. The hope that just as Christ was raised from the dead, we also will be raised with him to eternal life.

[ 19 : 52 ] So if you've received that word, it's implanted in you. But we have to take note of how James tells us to receive the word.

He says, with meekness. Meekness is the disposition that we ought to have. It underscores that our salvation is not of our own doing.

We don't just go out and get the word. We don't decide we're going to get the word today. We don't implant it in ourselves. It's not of our will.

It's of God's will. And meekness is the exact opposite of pride. And we realize that the saving of our souls is a kindness from God himself.

We know we have no reason to boast. So we should be driven to humility and not pride.

[ 20 : 57 ] And also in verse 21, the other two things that Paul tells us to do. He says to put away filthiness and to put away wickedness.

He tells us that to do these things, he tells us to do these things after showing us that pride and anger do not produce the righteousness of God.

But in telling us to do these things, he's holding out what does produce the righteousness of God.

He says, if you are to show that the righteousness of God is in you, not engage in what is filthy, not engage in what is wicked.

So now we're remembering that our natural tendencies is toward the wicked and toward the filthy. But we hear the word coming to us now and sending us a different direction. So this is why James emphasizes that it's important that we should not just hear the word, but we should do it.

[ 22 : 10 ] He says, but be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. So James is clearly saying here, if we claim to belong to God, but we do not do what scripture calls us to do, then we're lying to ourselves.

We're lying to ourselves about our very salvation. James is giving us sober warning. If we are not doing what the word of God calls us to do, then we ought to take a very serious look of ourselves, a look at our salvation.

So to be clear, salvation really is about belief. Romans 10 and 9 tells us that it is with the heart that we believe unto salvation. We believe that, and that's why we believe that someone can be saved at any point.

People always ask about death, bad confessions, and so forth. Because this is the work of God, he can choose to give his salvation at any point, even as someone takes their last breath.

Now, we can't argue with that. We can't argue with what God chooses to do with his salvation. But, I would say it is a great blessing to have some sign in your life, some manifestation, that you really have received the righteousness of God, that you really received the gift.

[ 23 : 42 ] So when we can point to evidences of saving grace in our lives, we obviously have a greater assurance that we have received salvation, that we have received the righteousness of

God.

And that is what doing what God says does for us. Now, I've come to really appreciate James' gift for giving examples.

And he gives another brilliant example here. He's going to give us an illustration in this passage that shows us the contrast between being only a herer and being a herer and a doer of the word.

So, 1 James gives this example of being a herer only. For if anyone is a herer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intensely at his natural face in the mirror.

For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. Let's stop and think about that for a moment.

[ 24 : 58 ] Because we all have faces. Think of this particular person that James gives this illustration of. What would we think about this person? What would be some of the commentary that we would have after realizing that this man has walked away from a mirror just a second ago and cannot remember his own face?

What would we call him? I'm sure we'd say some very unflattering, uncharitable things. Okay, I'm going to be the unrighteous one here.

No one wants to offer anything. I think we call this person a fool. What kind of idiot is this? He can't remember his own face. How long has he had his face? We could be very unkind with the comments that we would give.

But that is until we realize what the illustration is actually putting out to us. And then we realize that we could really be guilty of the very same thing.

In this example, the Word of God is compared to a mirror. And when we look into this mirror, we get a good look at who we really are.

[ 26 : 09 ] The Word of God reveals our true nature as we notice by the words that James carefully chooses. He says in verse 23 that this man looks at his natural face.

That's a clue. He exposes his natural flaws. His true nature. He sees the unrighteousness of himself.

His unrighteous character revealed. His natural face. And of course, the picture is not pretty. If when we walk away from the image, we don't remember those flaws, we don't remember that ugliness, the scars, then we are doing the same thing that this man did.

So in other words, we could hear a message today. We could be warned to be slow to speak, to be quick to hear, slow to anger. And immediately after walking out of here, we can go back to our ugly selves.

And we would be that man who has forgotten his natural face that he saw just seconds ago. And that's an incredible thing when you stop to think about it.

[ 27 : 21 ] How can someone forget their own likeness? But it happens. It happens to us time and time again, sometimes week after week, after sitting under the Word of God.

It's even more incredible when we look at how James frames it in this passage. He says in verse 23 that the man looks intently at his natural face.

In other words, this is a focused examination. This is nothing casual. And that's what the Word of God does. The Word of God reveals every fault in us.

The writer of Hebrews says, For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Now even if we can't explain that in some deep theological way, we know that it's true. Which of us have not been convicted under the Word of God?

[ 28 : 36 ] Our own experience will tell us the truth of that passage. So we can't run from the truth that confronts us in the light of God's Word.

But even worse than running, sometimes we deceive ourselves. For example, I could look in the mirror and I could see Denzel Washington staring back at me.

And you would say, Boy, this man is delusional. Clarence, you know good and well you ain't no Denzel Washington. I could be fooling myself.

But very often that's what we do. We can fool ourselves into thinking that our nature is more attractive than it really is. A lot of times we like to say we are good people at heart.

But brothers and sisters, that's not true. That's not what Scripture holds out to us. We're not good at all by God's standard. We are unrighteous.

[ 29 : 40 ] And righteousness comes only from God. If we remember that, that could help to keep our pride in check. But there's still good news.

James then gives us a contrasting illustration. He says, But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hero who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

So James now describes the word of God as the perfect law and the law of liberty. He urges us to look into this mirror, but now with a specific perspective.

By referring to the perfect law, James is saying that we have to look at God's word in its fullness. We have to see it in its complete form. So we can't just see the law of Moses, which really condemns us, which really shows us our unrighteousness. But we must also see the work of redemption that is carried out in the word of God.

[ 31 : 02 ] So along with the law of Moses, we see that redemption story, which emphasizes God's exceeding grace. And we see how the law is fulfilled in Christ when we see the gospel alongside the law of Moses.

Then the picture is complete. We see that our efforts are feeble to bring us salvation. It just can't happen. But we see even more that the sovereign God of the universe, in his mercy and his grace, brings salvation to us despite ourselves.

So when we look into the law, the perfect law, we see someone in the mirror even more beautiful than Danzel Washington. Ladies, even more beautiful than Halle Berry or anyone else you could imagine.

I don't know who's out there now as the iconic beauty person. But we see someone much more beautiful than that. And we see the perfect law.

In the mirror we will see our substitute. We see Jesus Christ himself, who brings us our liberty.

[ 32 : 20 ] Along with our unrighteousness, we can see the righteousness of God given to us through Christ.

So let me share with you what John MacArthur says about this law of liberty. And it will be projected for you as well. He says, by referring to the word as the law of liberty, James focused on its redemptive power in freeing believers from the bondage of sin and then freeing them to righteous obedience.

It allows us to serve God, not out of fear or mere sense of duty, but out of gratitude and love. One day, we'll also free us from this world and its corruption, from our fallenness, from our flesh, from temptation, from the curses of sin, death, and hell.

The law of liberty gives us freedom. It redeems us. And we must persevere.

We must continue to do what we are called to do. Notice that the one who looks at the perfect law, we don't hear anything about him walking away from it. He continues to hold us up. He continues to look into it.

[ 33 : 50 ] He continues to see Christ. And that's what we must do. We must continue to do what we are called to do. And always keep our eyes fixed on Christ.

So believers, at the beginning we spoke about pie and its flavor. Right now I want to take a moment and let you think about your life and compare it to a beautiful pie that might be laid out in front of you.

If the pie of your life was tested, what would it reveal? When someone goes into it, and they look at your actions, what you are doing, your way of life, what would it reveal?

What would it have the full flavor of the Christian world? To put it more directly, when people look at the way you live, is there clear evidence that you have received God's righteousness?

Can you and others around you have reasonable hope that you have been granted eternal life? And this morning I was talking with the praise team.

[ 35 : 12 ] I just mentioned, you know, as I grew up on Sundays I would often watch Ever Increasing Faith, a program with Fred Price.

There is a song that he plays at the beginning of it that introduces the TV show, his teaching. I looked into it, it is actually written by a person named Gary Paxton.

And Fred Price has a version of it, but some of the words go like this. Evidence, evidence, evidence, does your life show enough evidence?

Evidence, evidence, what does your life say? And it goes on to ask, if you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

