

James on Wisdom

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- [0 : 0 0] Today, we're talking about James, specifically the topic of this term in our church this season, the wisdom of James.
- I'll assume that James is the Lord's brother. That's contested, of course, out there in the broad world of scholarship, very much contested.
- But there's good reason still to believe that we're looking at a text written by a brother of Jesus and certainly the, if a, or probably the leader of the church in Jerusalem in its earliest, earliest days.
- What a resume that is. So by way of introduction, we should give James, I want to give James the first word. A theme, you know, James is right after the letter to the Hebrews, if that helps you.
- If you've got a Bible, you want to follow along throughout this talk, we're going to, you can make reference to it. This is a great characteristic word from this man. And it goes like this.
- [1 : 1 2] You know these words. They're well known. I know you know them. But let's hear from James. Just right off the bat. James 1, his first chapter, 22 to 27. The verse is 22 to 27.
- He says this. Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.
- He continues with a brief parable. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror.
- For he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing.
- Says James. That is, I think we can say that's quite straightforward, at least on its surface. That's quite straightforward. The text of James, he says here, expects performance.
- [2 : 3 8] Be doers, he says. Be doers. We are to look, he says, and to persevere in looking. Until we persevere until we see ourselves, in a sense.
- Apparently, this scene will be a kind of judgment. It shows this scene, how we are now, and what we are called to be.
- This mirror of the word. Be doers. Here also, I think we can say right off the bat in this early passage in his little epistle, here's a kind of urgency.
- This mirror is apparently transformative. If we read and obey, read and do, James says that as we do this, we shall be blessed.
- There is a promise, a gospel promise for sure. If you read this text and do what it says, here's a gospel promise.
- [3 : 5 4] You will be blessed. Not maybe, not perhaps. You will be blessed. So there's a good reason to pay attention to this amazing little treatise.
- It promises to read and obey means blessing. This treatise is sometimes called, I suppose reasonably enough, the Proverbs of the New Testament.

We're looking through Proverbs in our life together here at St. John's. Sometimes this book is compared with Proverbs. It certainly contains, maybe this is the only reason it's compared.

It contains, as you know, aphorisms. Many, many forms of aphorism. James used it. If you read the scholars, I've been reading the last couple of weeks, they can bore you to tears telling you about different forms of the aphorism in this book.

Well, won't touch it. There are aphorisms, but there are endless sub, there's certain types of aphorisms. There are contrasts of aphorisms and this kind of aphorism, that kind.

[5 : 03] The aphorism is a form, I think this is helpful. The aphorism is a form of conceptual concentration. I like that little phrase, conceptual concentration.

The aphorism lives by the authors of aphorisms attempt linguistic aptness, which produces in us, the readers and hearers, an imaginative impact.

The aphorism isn't just a sort of a toy. Let's play games with short little phrases. The aphorism has conceptual concentration. It is formed by a linguistic aptness, which produces imaginative impact.

To teach us things we need to know. The aphorism, I'm sure you'll agree with this. It's worth thinking about, I think. The aphorism slows us down.

It's meant to slow us down. It says, the aphorism, take note of this. Do not forget this. Make this your own.

[6 : 14] The aphorism, I like to say, slows us down. Do not see this truth and then turn away and forget. Like the one who sees his face in a mirror, but then turns away and forgets what he looked like, to use James' little beautiful little parable about the word of God as a mirror.

Aphorisms are profound. God opposes the proud. But gives grace to the humble. There's an aphorism. God opposes the proud.

If you want an enemy of God, be proud. God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. That's from Proverbs 3, 34.

It's a gloss on Proverbs. 1 Peter 5, 5 says, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

It's repeated. This is an aphorism that Scripture says, Get that? Don't turn away. Look at that as in a mirror.

[7 : 26] Stay with it. Slow down. Take it in. Live by that. God opposes the proud. Gives grace to the humble.

conceptual concentration for sure. Slow down. Do you, do I see myself in that mirror? Will I hear that or read and then forget what I've just read?

God opposes the proud, says this aphorism. Slow down. Take it in. God opposes the proud.

Gives grace to the humble. Peter says it. James says it. Proverbs says it. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the humble, the Lord says. There it is.

I know only two definitions of poetry. I've just come across them. I haven't sought them out. But along the way, I've come across two definitions of poetry.

[8 : 34] Aphorisms are, they at least have a strong family resemblance to poetry. Robert Frost, for instance, calls poetry, I love this, a stay in the confusion.

Beautiful definition of poetry. A stay in the confusion. The other one is in T.S. Eliot. You'll find it in his four quartets. One of the great achievements of Christian culture, I think, four quartets.

He calls poetry, it's a line in that poem, concentration without elimination. Concentration without elimination.

That's what an aphorism does for you. It concentrates and doesn't leave out anything that's important. If it left out something that's important, why bother with it? God gives grace to the humble.

He poses the proud. Yes. Life is a confusion. I think Robert Frost saw that. Life is a confusion. If you take it serious, it's great tribulation.

[9 : 42] Last book the Bible calls life. So I need a stable place in this confusion. There's another wisdom teacher in the Bible, you know, who called it a house.

If I need a place which is stable, he called it a house built upon a rock. Who can forget that little aphorism? A house built upon a rock. I need to remember this stable place, this rock, in a concentrated statement, without leaving anything out.

How about, well, I'll say it one more time. God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Have you pondered that?

You can ponder that for your whole life. There it is. So today, again, by way of looking at James, by way of the spirit, we're going to find out in this, this epistle, this treatise, the spirit who gives the gift of divine wisdom.

Let us spend some time with, again, the leader of the church in Jerusalem in her earliest years. With one who is the Lord's brother.

[10 : 52] Must know something about Jesus being the Lord's brother. So before we begin, before we go any further, let's say a word of prayer. Lord, we come to you today knowing that we lack wisdom, and that we need wisdom.

So today we ask for wisdom. We ask that you show us what wisdom is. We ask that you give it to us because our Lord is wisdom, and he has come into the world to give us wisdom, wisdom for life and for eternity.

Our Father, we pray this in the name of our wisdom, your gift to us, Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. A very, very brief look at the structure of this little book.

The structure, I'm still working on this in the discussion time. It'd be interesting to hear what you think about this. If the structure of a book helps you understand it a bit or a lot or not at all, but the structure may or may not, again, add to our understanding of it, to our comprehension of what is said here in James' little epistle.

I find that at least a bit interesting how this book is apparently structured. Some scholars, I think a good number of them, see James in three parts, usually called its prescript, its introduction, a prescript followed by an introduction, followed by an exposition.

[12 : 26] Part one, the prescript, could not be shorter, so I'll read it. The prescript to the whole book says, James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the dispersion, greetings, greetings, James 1, one.

Scholars say that there's the first part of the whole book. Nice, simple, and straight. Straightforward. To, therefore, all of this is open to challenge, but my favorite commentator on James thinks it's quite very much this.

It's written to essentially Jewish Christians throughout the Roman Empire, both, all parts of the empire, west and east. To, therefore, all of the Jewish Christians who are out there in the Roman Empire, the twelve tribes.

Part two, the introduction, runs from verse two on this way of reading this book, from verse two of chapter one through to the end of the chapter.

In this section, we have a collection of aphorisms. I'm quoting here Richard Baucom, who's written a lovely little commentary on James.

[13 : 47] Here we have a collection of aphorisms, carefully compiled in order to introduce all of the main themes in the next section, which is the rest of the letter.

Chapters two, beginning, chapter two, verse one, right to the end of the letter, which is called the exposition. This section, this second section, is designed to highlight the overarching theme of the whole work, which is, or one of the overarching themes, which is, this is a bit interesting, I think, to note, as people have read this for a long time.

The overarching theme of the work, or one of them, is perfection. James is interested in perfection. I'm not good at pronouncing Greek words.

My Greek at Regent was pretty good, but, the teleos, the outcome of something. The outcome of your life, is meant to be, according to James, according to all of Scripture, perfection.

God is calling us on to perfection. There is a word group, that James constantly refers to.

[15 : 04] It's a word group, that could be described as, the perfect, complete word group, indicating, indicating this perfection, that we're called to, called to in life.

And throughout the epistle, this word group occurs, seven times. That is not thought of, by a man like Richard Baucom, to be, in any way, an accident.

The number seven, in the Hebrew mind, always indicates, completeness, fullness, perfection. Let steadfastness, have its full effect, that you may be, perfect and complete, lacking nothing, lacking nothing.

here is the great, one of the great, I think the great theme, of James' little epistle, his little treatise.

We are called, in the presence of God, in the mystery of the gospel, to head out towards perfection. And this, again, this word group, is, references to this word, and this word group, occur seven times.

[16 : 26] It's interesting to note, that the wonderful, little passage, in chapter three, which begins at verse 17, I won't read it now, about the wisdom, from above.

You recall that passage. It defines, heavenly wisdom, with seven attributes. Seven attributes, attributed to heavenly wisdom.

This chapter, this chapter one, verses two to 27, again, which is thought of, as the introduction, to the book, introduces, virtually, every topic, which is expounded, at some greater length, in chapters two, through five, which is therefore, called the exposition, portion, of James' little treatise.

There you go. Something about, the, how this structure begins. Apparently, then part three, I'm skipping something here, for sake of time.

Part three, is composed of, sections, which unfold, all of the issues, directly or indirectly, raised, in the introduction.

[17 : 41] I'll run through them, for you, very, what a, very briefly. What an array of issues, James covers, in chapter, the end of, at the end of chapter one, two, three, four, five.

James talks about, the following issues. Partiality, and the law, of love. Chapter two, one to 13.

He then, talks about, faith and works. Two, 14 to 26. He then, famously, talks about, the tongue, the tongue, three, one to 12.

He then, goes on to talk about, true and false wisdom, which is, chapter three, 13 to 18. He then, has a call, to the double-minded, to repent, which is, four, chapter four, one to 10.

He then, has a little, a little, section, on, against, judging one another. Just two verses, four, 11 and 12.

[18 : 39] Then, he has, with apologies, to anybody here, who's a merchant, he has a little passage, on denunciation, of merchants. Chapter four, 13 to 17. He then, goes on, to denounce, landowners.

Again, with apologies, to landowners. Chapter five, one to six. He then, moves on, to holding out, in the Christian life, until the parousia, the Lord's second coming.

Chapter five, seven to 11. Then, he has a little section, just one verse, speaking the whole truth. Chapter five, verse 12. He then, has a little section, on prayer.

Chapter five, 13 to 18. And then, he concludes his treatise, with a little passage, on reclaiming, those, who err. I'm not, boring you to tears, but I thought, I'd run through, the whole book, just in that way.

Reclaiming those who err, chapter five, verses 19, to 20. There you have it, and that's how the little treatise ends. So, the outline of the whole book, kind of goes like this.

[19 : 48] It begins, by saying, this is to the 12 tribes. And, we're told, to pursue, perfection, wholeness, completion, et cetera, seven times.

And, if you were counting, the sections, just happen to be, well, 12 sections. 12, 7, 12.

12. This is written by a Jew, who really thinks like a Jew. 12, 7, 12. The tribes are 12, the apostles are 12, and in between, is the pursuit of wisdom.

Does that help? I don't know if that helps, but there's a man like Richard Baucom, thinks that that's really what we're staring at here.

And he thinks there is significance to that. I'm still working on this. It does say in Proverbs, things like, every word of God is perfect.

[21 : 03] Jews took that very seriously. When James, if nothing else, I'm instructed in this, when James sat down, to think through, what he wanted to teach, the 12 tribes, in the dispersion, he did it, he had, there was nothing casual about it.

He ordered it, as best he could. He wanted it to be, just a perfect expression, of wisdom.

12, 7, 12. Maybe that helps, maybe it doesn't. But at least, at the very least, I thought, well, thank you for that insight, Mr. Commentator.

At least I've come away with, you can help me with this later. I've learned from that, there's nothing casual here. James has really thought through, what you need to hear, and obey, so that you receive a blessing.

A promise is here. So, now, just, more importantly, I think I can say that, a closer look, at just a theme or two, in the third section, the exposition, passage.

[22 : 22] James, famously, as you know, really wants us, to think about, the topic of, speech. Famously, speech.

The way we talk, is a prominent theme in James, to put it mildly. At chapter one, here's an example, of how he throws out a topic, and then he, later on, he'll unfold it a bit, for you.

At chapter one, verse 26, this theme of speech, is introduced, just in passing. Famously, this is the, famous words, so many famous words, in James.

If anyone, thinks, he says, if anyone thinks, he is religious, and does not, bridle his tongue, but deceives his heart, this person's religion, is worthless.

I like that, the punchiness, of James, this teacher, this preacher, this wisdom teacher. I want to say after that, something like, wow. Do you want to make sure, that your religion, is absolutely worthless.

[23 : 37] No matter if you're a theologian, or a preacher, or a mystic, or whatever you are, whatever your religion is, you think of it, if you want to make sure, that it's worthless, just neglect, the way you talk.

That'll make your religion, worthless. According to James, strong language, about speech. Now, if you want, if you are, looking at your Bible, look at chapter 3, James 3, and I'll just start, to read a bit of this, where he unfolds, this, this theme.

Here's a, a word for, for people, who stand up, but learners exchange, not many of you, should become teachers, he says. Should I sit down now, or?

My brothers, and sisters, for you know, that we who teach, will be judged, with greater strictness. That's, what a word, for we all stumble, in many ways, and if anyone, does not stumble, in what he says, he is a, perfect man.

[24 : 47] There's the theme again, of perfection. He's a perfect man. He is perfect, because he bridles his tongue, able to bridle, his whole body, he says.

If we, put bits, into the mouths of horses, so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies, as well. 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 direct.

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.

There's a kind of aphorism, never to forget. And the tongue, is a fire, he says. A fire, a world, of unrighteousness.

The tongue, is set among our members, staining the whole body, set on fire, setting on fire, the whole course of life, set on fire, by hell. You know, for time's sake.

[25 : 54] You know, you know what he's saying here. We bless the Lord, and our Father God, but with the same tongue, we curse people. From the same mouth, come blessing and cursing, my brothers and sisters, these things, ought not to be.

What an emphasis, on speech, James puts, in front of us. James has made, says one commentator, not my good guy, Richard Baucom, but I think this is a powerful word, to say about this.

James has made, control of speech, the premier, the first, ethical, and spiritual task, of man. Do you think that's true?

I don't know. James has made, I don't like the word, premier, I'd rather say first. James has made, control of speech, the first, ethical, and spiritual, task of man.

Is that true? I don't know. James says, your religion, can be made worthless, because you didn't control, that thing.

[27 : 03] It is set, on fire, by hell. James, the leader of the, church in Jerusalem, I'm not sure, I'm just wandering, from my text here, but I couldn't help, but think this all the time.

Pentecost, is tongues of fire, from heaven. Is James meaning, to say, was there pride, in some people, in the church, in Jerusalem? We heard the gospel, with tongues of fire, from heaven.

And is he, setting up a contrast? Is he saying, your tongue, can be from hell. I don't know, there's, I haven't got any, authority, I haven't heard any, commentator, make that point, but it seems so, obviously, a contrast.

The tongues of fire, at Pentecost. Now a wisdom teacher, is saying, the tongue, can be set on fire, by evil, by hell itself. Speech should be, here is one of his, big themes, whole and complete.

As such, speech will not be, more or less, reliable. This is a theme, that James, has decided, to really, hit home on.

[28 : 21] Because speech, is so very often, more or less, reliable, we live in a world, where the vow, or the oath, is thought necessary.

So, look at your handout now. So at, at his, chapter 5, verse 12, James, really hits home, on this theme.

Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear, either by heaven, or by earth, or with any oath. Let your yes, be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not, fall under, condemnation.

Wow. And as you see here, James here, is really, picking up, something he heard, from his older brother, Jesus.

So on the left hand column, just hear the echoes, again, you have heard, that it was said, to those of ancient times, you shall not swear, falsely, but carry out the vows, that you have made, to the Lord.

[29 : 25] But I say to you, do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, by the earth, it is his footstool, by Jerusalem, it is the city of the great king.

Do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair, white or black. Let your word be, yes, yes, no, no, anything more than this, comes from the evil one. The speech can be evil, the tongue can be set on fire, by hell.

James has learned this. Who knows the sources really, as a whole Jewish wisdom tradition, to call upon. It's quite significant, but Jesus is a wisdom teacher, who says exactly that.

And then later in Matthew, that passage obviously, is famously from the Sermon on the Mount. Later in Matthew, the Lord says, your words, by your words you'll be justified, by your words you'll be condemned, just as James says, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

Direct echoes here, in this passage, of Jesus, and his brother James. James, at this point, just to emphasize this, comes as close, to a direct quote, from Jesus, as anywhere, in his treatise.

[30 : 41] Here he's almost, quoting verbatim, isn't it? You can see, the direct echoes here. Richard Baucom, talks like this, the sayings of Jesus, to which allusion is made, here in this passage, is a highly distinctive one, in which Jesus takes the traditional Jewish concern for truthfulness of speech, to a, I like this little expression, to a novel extreme, demanding such unqualified truthfulness in all speech, that the use of oaths, must be given up completely.

Jesus does this often, in his teaching. He'll take a bit of Jewish wisdom, and he takes it, into its most extreme form. This highlights, something very challenging, in the Bible's wisdom teaching, I think.

There is, in the Bible, a kind of, we would call it, I think, prudential wisdom teaching. I think the book of Proverbs is lots about that.

We heard about it in our good sermon this morning, at 7.30, how to be, if you will, shrewd, how to be wise, as you go through the practical stuff of life.

And that, my goodness, is an important kind of wisdom, for sure. You know, good advice about good conduct, in life, as we try to get along together.

[32 : 24] But there is another kind of wisdom, and it might be called, I would, crisis wisdom, or it's been called sometimes, counter order wisdom.

Some prefer to call it, kingdom wisdom. It is a kind of wisdom. You get this always, in the Gospels. You certainly get it in James, that seems to me.

You get a kind of wisdom, which is disturbing, even kind of shocking. You know? So, a prudential kind of wisdom teacher, might say, no, be measured in your speech.

It's good. It helps you get along with people. And that's a bit of common sense wisdom, isn't it? Parents may give that to their children, all the time. You will get by in the world, if you take some care, with your speech.

But no, here, James, in this handout, we see this quite clearly, James and his brothers say, prudential, forget about being prudent, by your words, you will be justified.

[33 : 38] And by your words, you will be condemned. There's nothing prudential about it. It might be called the prudence of the eschaton.

On the day of judgment, you're going to be confronted with your speech. There's nothing kind of, this is disturbing, isn't it?

This is always present. I think we can say safely, always present in James. In the introduction, as you know, he famously says, these words are always kind of, they always shock me.

I love them, but they always disturb me, and I hope in a good way. Count it all joy, imagine having a counselor say this to you. Count it all joy, my sisters and brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.

Count it all joy. You lucky guy, you. Trouble has come into your life. You lucky one. Count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds.

[34 : 50] For you know that the testing of your faith produces, again, this word group, steadfastness, patience. You're on the way to God-likeness almost.

There it is. When this is unfolded at chapter 5, verse 7, and forward, he commends patience.

How does he command patience? Because he says the coming of the Lord is at hand. The farmer waits patiently for the crop.

Why be patient, James says? Well, because the coming of the Lord is at hand. It's not the advice, well, you'll feel better about yourself. You'll get on with other people better if you're patient.

It kind of just smooths out the rough parts of life. Well, patience does that. But James says patience is demanded of you because the coming of the Lord is at hand.

[35 : 52] You wouldn't want the Lord on the day of his return to catch you in a state of impatience. That would be shameful. Patience seems to be, in the wisdom literature, the obedience that we always owe God.

always, I owe God, patience. So, think of speech. Think of patience, not just in terms of prudence, but as always under heaven's judgment.

This kind of extreme wisdom literature seems to say, indeed, I mean, to point out the obvious, again, James is a teacher of wisdom.

He says at 1.5, this is the other part of James, which is so amazing and I find so helpful. First chapter, verse 5, famous words of James, If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

there is a gospel promise that we can embrace today, like an aphorism. Don't turn away, I say this to myself, don't turn away and forget what I've just seen, what I've just heard.

[37 : 22] There is divine wisdom that God wants to give me, wants to give you, and James says, rather shockingly at this point when it's meditated upon by people who study Jewish wisdom literature, not to be flippant here, but it's sometimes said, sometimes in the Jewish wisdom literature, you have this, where is wisdom to be found?

In Job, for instance. It's hidden from humans. And it often, that's true. Where's wisdom? Where's wisdom in politics, in economics, in social life, in the church's life?

Where do you find wisdom? James says, it's for the asking. All you gotta do is ask. Where did James maybe pick that idea?

Maybe from his brother. Ask. It will be given to you. In this dispensation of the gospel, perhaps we can gloss it that way to make it a bit softer or a bit more comprehensible.

Wisdom's for the asking. Just ask for it, says James. If any of you lack wisdom, is he being a bit ironic there? Did anybody put up their hand? Can I go to the washroom now?

[38 : 42] I don't need wisdom. I don't have to listen to this part of your teaching, James, today. I lack wisdom every day. And James says, ask for it.

Ask for wisdom. Ask for patience. Patience is such a hard virtue. It seems, you forget it in a, have you noticed, I do, not you, you saintly people, you, it's hard.

But me, I lose patience in a moment. I'll become sharp for someone in speech. Some little thing puts me off. The coffee isn't as warm as I thought it should be.

Yep. And in, in, in the presence of the Lord, I get sharp with my speech, with my brothers and my sisters. And James says, this is shameful.

We owe God the obedience of patience every moment. I, Kierkegaard, Kierkegaard loved the letter of James. Kierkegaard calls patience a mighty warrior.

[39 : 45] Patience will give you strength, and stability for life. For the battle of life, this confusion that we live in. Patience is like a warrior that comes inside, takes up residence in you, and makes you strong for life.

Patience is a mighty warrior. I love that word from that strange Danish thinker. There you go. I'm running out of time.

I want to, there's so much in James. I don't, I've had this experience just for what it's worth. In preparing for this, I just, I love nothing else.

Last few days, I just thought, every day, once a day, it's not a big task. Just read the book of James straight through. You can do it in very few moments. Not, not, not long at all.

And properly understood, I kept having this experience. I kept thinking, well, that didn't help me much. And I think my teacher, Richard Baucom, will tell you, it's not, yes, that's, that's a good experience.

[40 : 51] That's, it doesn't help much to read it through. It's meant to be, you take each little section, this aphoristic mystery text, I will call it, and just say, I'm going to make it my own.

I'm going to keep on listening because that's the way the text is supposed to perform in your life. You take it in one little bit, stay with it, chew on it, live by it, pray about it, ask the Lord for the wisdom to know how to apply this in my life right now.

I keep wanting to call it James the right now wisdom of scripture. Right now, what should I be doing? James says, be wise, ask for wisdom, be patient, patient, patient, patient, not as a virtue that you love to think about, right now, in your experience of the world, your experience of yourself, your experience with other people, am I, or am I not, patient?

The Lord is in my presence. He wants me to be patient, patient. Ask for wisdom about patience. There you go. I didn't know how to end this and I thought, well, it is still, the, we're still in the year when we remember the Reformation.

Luther, as you know, loved strong language and he based his whole understanding of the gospel, I don't think I'm overstating this one little bit, he loved the promises which are in holy scripture.

[42 : 33] He loved, for good or for ill, such extreme language at times that, you know, the famous, other famous fellow of Luther's generation, a bit earlier than Luther, Erasmus of Rotterdam, he called Luther, I love this, Dr. Hyperbolicus, which hardly needs translation, Dr. Hyperbolicus, the exaggerating teacher, the Latin is rendered, the exaggerating teacher.

Luther thought that believing the promises was nothing less than to fulfill the command to love God. When you believe a promise, you're saying, God, you are so reliable, you are so infinitely good that I'll believe every word you say and you thereby fulfill the first commandment to love God.

I think that's a great insight from Martin. One of his lesser insights was the way he treated the book of James. That was a great error in Luther's life. But he should have spent more time with James, he would have the Lutheran tradition never went along with Martin on this.

His good colleagues love James. Believing a promise honors God, tells God that he's utterly faithful, that you can rely on the words of God.

So, to that end, here's a promise. Do you lack wisdom? says James. Ask God. It will be given.

[44 : 08] There's a promise. If you ask God, it will be given. There's a promise. Luther says this kind of thing in his magnificent treatise called The Freedom of a Christian.

The promises of God, says the great reformer, the promises of God are holy, true, righteous, peaceful, and filled with total goodness.

happiness. The soul that adheres to them with a firm faith is not simply united with them, and here's the rhetorician, but fully swallowed up by them, to be fully swallowed up by a promise of God, but also saturated.

This is Luther, the rhetorician. The promises of God, Luther says, we are saturated with them. We are intoxicated by them, by their every power, saturated, intoxicated with a promise of God, with all of the promises of God.

That is from Luther's famous, again, The Freedom of a Christian. That's Luther at his very best, it seems to me. You know the famous two-part theme of Luther's, again, this magnificent statement of the gospel.

[45 : 35] Luther says, and he says, here's my theme, here's what I want to talk to you about. This is, by the way, one of his more gentle pieces of writing. He wrote it to a pope.

He wanted a pope to give it a hearing, so he, you know, put aside calling him the Antichrist. The Christian, says Luther, theme one, the Christian is a complete free Lord of all, subject to none.

The Christian, theme two, is a completely free Lord of all, subject to all. That's magnificent. Gets that from the gospel.

Christ, the exalted one who became humble. We start to live into the mystery of Christ. We experience the exalted one of who Christ is and the humble servant who Christ is.

Oh, Luther knew the gospel. I think Luther, I think James would say amen to that. Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, he says, and the rich, he means the rich brother in his humiliation.

[46 : 48] The gospel's about our exaltation and our humiliation. Luther saw that. Philippians two sees that. Paul talks about this in Corinthians all the time.

Life and death are yours. You Christians, you don't know how privileged you are in Christ to be exalted in him and to serve in humility in him.

In Christ, we have been lifted up so James knows, so the whole gospel knows, so that we may serve all. The gospel exalts and it humbles.

one line from the New English Bible quoting a verse from a psalm simply says, you shall know his power today if you will listen to his voice.

It's like a vanity word. You will know his power today if you listen to his voice. I think that's sort of a kind of summarizing word about James.

[47 : 49] James says, just get down to it. Just get down to it. Really get before God, ask him for wisdom, ask him for patience, ask him to become the Lord of your speech.

Let us get on with the task of perfection, of wholeness, of completion. Let's move on in these things, says James to the Jews in the diaspora, to Christians everywhere.

We read James in the canon of scripture. It's a glorious, glorious little picture of the Christian life in Christ. I want to say a prayer, then do a postscript, and then questions.

We've got 10 or 15 minutes. Lord, thank you for James and his word to us. May we hear what he is saying, as he was moved by the Holy Spirit to pen these words, these perfect words, calling us to a perfect life in Christ.

We thank you for them. Help us to be responsible in attending to them. May we, Lord, always be doers of your word. Amen.

[49 : 08] So, right now, think about questions. As I give you a little postscript here, which I find interesting, I did just touch upon the fact that Luther, Luther didn't think he heard much gospel of James, and he was a mistake.

It's funny how you look at a Bible, and it gives, here come the books of the New Testament, and it always starts with the gospel for them, then it moves on to the mystery of Jesus, then the gospel starts to be unfolded in the world, the acts of the apostles.

And then, of course, our Bible goes, Romans, Paul suddenly is the big guy. If you take, and this is open to a proper understanding, strictly in the order of the canon in the Western Latin church, always, then Paul takes over.

Paul tells you what the gospel is. Then you take a deep breath, and then sort of in your Bible study group, okay, let's do something, maybe Peter, 1, 2, James, 1, 2, 3, John, get down to funny little books like Jude, and the last book of the Bible, which largely is incomprehensible.

It isn't really, but it's how it first blush. There's every reason, the early church, the Orthodox church would be much more open to the idea that the mystery of Jesus happens, then the acts of the apostles.

[50 : 41] What happens in the first half of Acts? Well, you hear about Peter, James, and John. And so the Bible would then unfold with Peter, James, and John. They'd be sort of the first, in the canon's unfolding, they would come first.

And Paul comes, Paul's not, Paul then happens in the canon. Paul, and John, that's why, because of our, you might say, because, not just chiefly, but because of historical and canon order issues, we're used to saying, is James consistent with Paul?

You know, not, don't tell me about your faith, I want to hear about your works. But the real question might be, is Peter, is, sorry, is Paul consistent with James?

You know, because the, you could say, James is the first word out of the gate. How is it with your life in Christ right now? Are you obedient? Are you getting on with wisdom and patience?

Is your speech holy? Don't go into big theological issues, Romans, Galatians, etc. I want to hear about your life in Christ first. You know, but this could be misleading, as Richard Bauckham says, this can be very misleading because the church has a liturgical reading of scripture, not a canonical reading.

[52 : 16] But nevertheless, these issues of the order of the books have had an impact probably on the church's life. That's why Luther just thought Romans and Galatians, that's the gospel.

James? He couldn't quite figure out why James was there. He may have had it backwards. It might be better for us at times to remember this order.

Maybe we should hear from the guy who preaches the gospel first, Peter, Peter, and James, and John. Then, psychologically, if not theologically, it's psychologically.

James gets second billing, but maybe that's a weakness in our habitual thinking. But again, that's just a great big footnote, and you haven't been listening because you're now thinking of questions to ask me, and it's a couple minutes after the time.

I guess we can go to 1015. So, please, denunciations, outrage, disagreement, whatever. John. John. I thought it was neat how you mentioned the tongues of fire in James, then all the tongues of fire in Pentecost.

[53 : 29] I remember Pentecost, White Sunday in the prayer book, Whit Sunday, then another part of Whit Sunday. Boy, if there's a fiery person, if it's from the Holy Spirit, or if it's not, on the other hand, then it shows, but it's not the other type of fiery tongue, like, oh, my goodness gracious, you can tell.

Now, they say when Paul describes the progress of the gospel, he shamelessly says to the Jew first, then to the Gentile.

So, Paul might have thought this is a good order, to the extent that order speaks to anyone. First, the Jews hear the gospel, then the Gentiles. That's why he ends Romans, a lot of the last part of Romans, all about the mystery of why in the world my Gentiles being plugged into the story of Israel, because it's a mystery that Gentiles have come into the blessings of Israel.

So, there's something to commend that. Paul himself might like this. again, the order of books in the New Testament does not necessarily shape our ranking of them.

Perhaps there should be no ranking of them. But anyway, at the back, I see a gentleman with a question. Yeah, that's very interesting way you're ending this, because Paul started a little bit of a question.

[55 : 03] Yeah, he couldn't stand their message, yeah. And then he had a real ministry to the Gentiles, I guess, Paul did.

But maybe we have to see what he was persecuting before we can understand. Yeah, sure, sure. Sure. Sheila?

You started by quoting a well-known verse, the doers of the word not hearers doers. Yes. My Catholic friends always quote this to me, and I want to talk for a few days with them.

And my point of view would be that works are a manifestation of this, which is a truth, in a sense, is what you have experienced. Sure. But they really take this very seriously.

There's going to be no salvation for them without this combination. Is that, I don't know if that's one of the reasons that Luther left this book out of his translation, I suspect it's only one, but it has created some confusion, has it not, in the Christian church over the centuries?

[56 : 15] Yes, yes. Yeah, sure, there's always, yes, as you, there's been the issue of what about faith and works, especially since the Reformation, because of Luther's, Luther did say there are good things in James, but he just didn't find, quote, enough gospel there.

He, he, he, he, but, I mean, there's a strong consensus now, I didn't want to, there's a strong consensus now that faith as intellectual assent is never present to Paul.

Faith has inherent in it works, the works of gratitude, that faith has saved me, that my faith, the object of my faith has saved me, Jesus. So there doesn't seem to be too much serious argument anymore, more.

But the surface of James is obviously punchy for a Paul. Some people have suggested, but not, it's not too much, I don't think it's broadly accepted, but there may have been a form of Paulanism, not Paul, but teachers of Paul, who did become distorted and put aside law so much that the virtues became invisible.

And if that was true, you can hear James say, no, no, faith has to be accompanied by the works of love, as Kierkegaard's phrase. But I don't think there's much of a dispute anymore, it's not a living thing anymore.

[57 : 53] But faith as assent, mere intellectual assent, is never, Paul says in Galatians, faith works by love. Faith works.

Someone described St. Augustine's whole worldview, the tension in it, as Romans, Paul says, not by works. In Galatians, he says, faith works.

So, the tension, he put those two together. you know, so, I don't, I don't, I don't think there's any longer a dispute. There isn't much, and to the Lutheran tradition always includes, includes James as Holy Scripture, it's read as part of the canon, so they don't, they don't turn their back on, Luther just, I think, just had a weak moment there.

He was so eager to preach just, just, justification by faith alone, which is a magnificent thing to hear, but he, he should have been more patient with James, he should have waited.

Luther often was unwilling to wait sometimes, that's his rhetorical self, his doctor diabolica rhetorica is whatever he's, whatever, but I, Luther's rhetoric was usually beautiful, very helpful, I think.

[59 : 20] I do want to be a free lord of all subject to none, and a free lord of all subjects, to all. That's the glory that we've been called to in the mystery of our, of our faith.

Anything else out there? Don't be shy. Ah, Reverend. So is there grace in James? Ah, sure.

Sure. Sorry, I'm not trying to stop you. No, no, no. Well, I mean, there's different ways of, there's the royal law, the law of liberty.

Richard Baucom, thinks this is Jesus who unfolds Torah. That's why it's the royal law that gives liberty. He does write, as a servant of Jesus Christ, and he does say rather remarkably, is it not a grace when you can say, do you lack wisdom?

Ask. The God of all grace gives wisdom. So I, but it is embedded in the issue of right now, how is it with your life right now?

[60 : 40] That your speech, especially, is an indicator, perhaps the chief indicator of who you are right now, the way you speak. Listen to your speech, he says.

I find that challenging and very helpful, but that's the best answer I can give. The early church finds it appropriate that this is canonical scripture.

So the tradition says it's the story of grace is here, implicit. To that point, of course Paul unfolds grace and the salvation of the astonishing gift of salvation.

And you say, well, I don't quite see that unfolding in this little book. Bauckham says, read Paul roughly around 9, 10, 11.

Or, no, no, no, read Paul 12 and forward. That's the equivalent in Paul of James, where Paul unfolds, you know, giving yourself into the ways of the Christian life, where the number of references to Jesus there are proportionately the same as in the length of this treatise from James.

[62 : 00] James. Yeah, so, I found, if anybody has a great commentary on James, please, I've only found one that really helped me, it's Richard, Richard Bauckham from St.

Andrews, this is a gem, but it's a bit technical in places, and it can, but it's pretty good. How do you spell this? B-A-U-C-K-H-A-M.

I always remember this text with great, with great gratitude and significance, because I remember, I love Richard Bauck, I've done a course with him, he's a wonderful New Testament scholar, this little thing is, that cost me \$70.

Pray for Regent students and the cost of texts, but a good investment in the kingdom, a good investment in the kingdom of James.

And while we're talking about books, if you ever want to read the freedom of a Christian at this season of Reformation remembering, you can get at Regent this lovely little fortress press, which is a Lutheran American community, there's the freedom of a Christian written by Lutheran 1520, annotated, lots of stuff about that magnificent treatise by Bill, I'm doing your work for you here today.

[63 : 39] And this one, it's a song, 20 bucks. But that's Luther, I find Luther at his magnificent best.

Just one minute. Okay, we have one more minute. One more question. Please. Does the Catholic Bible not have the book of James? Oh, it does, sure. All the traditions, Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, all have James in Holy Scripture.

Luther was willing to say, he was unguarded about his response to James. James. James. I think it's a great book.

Of course, I mean, I'm an Orthodox Christian. Am I supposed to say, nah, I don't know. Well, Harvey, thank you. I'm just going to prophesy a little bit. Prophesy?

Commissions are for blessings. Sorry, what are? Commissions are for blessings. Yeah, right. No, no, no. I'll be patient. Yes. James, thank you.

[64 : 49] Thanks a lot, Harvey. Thank you. Very, very much. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.