

James and the Words of Christ

Sermon 19 in the James Series

James 5:12

Today it is my intention to only deal in an expository way with one verse of Scripture – verse 12 of chapter 5.

Then, we will take a short walk through the epistle of James. It's good to sometimes take a step back from the close examination of the tree to see the grandeur of the forest.

That is what I will try to do today. As we come to the close of James Epistle. Maybe two or three, four at the most more messages – I want to examine the close connection between the epistle of James and the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ as given to us in the gospels.

Some try to make James and Paul into opponents of one another.

I hope we have been able to disprove that to your satisfaction.

However, they certainly do have different styles and different points of emphasis.

Differences in vocabulary.

James is pastoral and practical – while Paul certainly is pastoral and practical – but usually attempts to build a theological basis for what he says more than James.

That is why we say James is NT wisdom literature.

It isn't wisdom literature in the sense of Proverbs or Ecclesiastes.

It is wisdom literature in the way he often gives exhortations, imperative commands and even admonitions – more than we find in Paul.

Stylistically – James is more similar to Peter than to Paul.

Pastor James.

Doctor Paul.

But – what REALLY stands out is the influence of his earthly-half-brother – Jesus Christ – stylistically and thematically and that is what I hope to show today.

I. Do not Swear 5:12

What we have here is almost an exact quote from the words of our Lord. It's not exact, but what you would expect from oral tradition – because James was probably written before Matthew. The doctrine is the same.

James 5:12
Do not swear
either by heaven
or by earth
or with any other oath

But let your yes be yes
and *your* no, no
lest you be judged

Matthew 5:34-37
Do not swear at all
neither by heaven
nor by the earth
nor by Jerusalem...Nor shall you swear
by your head (with explanations)
But let your yes be yes
And your no, no.
whatever is more... is from the evil one

Read James 5:12
Go to Matthew 5:34-37

1. This is obviously not a coincidence.
James is purposely teaching what he heard Jesus teach.
2. It would be very easy to dismiss this passage as “unimportant”.
That would go against the very words James uses.

But some have said they are not all that important – even to the point of wondering why they are hear, or speculating they were added later.
Absolutely NO evidence for that – pure speculation.

3. James says, “Above all”. So does that mean this is the most important thing he wants us to take away from this epistle.

No.

-- He is not saying this is not the most important thing of all.

-- This is his way of making a transition – closing his letter.

We are coming to his conclusion in 3 parts.

This verse

Verses 13-18

And finally 19-20

James has spoken so much about the tongue.

Here are his concluding remarks on how we use our tongue for good or evil.

And he does so by going right back to the teaching of Christ.

4. Lawful oaths – Chapter 23 of our Confession

Why would our confession have a chapter on taking oaths and vows?

Our PB forefathers were accused of being Anabaptists – and they denied it.

-- Many Anabaptists refused to take any kind of an oath or a vow.

-- Today – there are some – like J.W.'s who will not take an oath in court to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, or say the pledge to the flag.

It is true that our PB forefathers followed much of the Savoy and Westminster Confessions in this chapter.

BUT – what you might not know

They made some changes.

They wanted to confess the rightness of proper vows in proper circumstances – and if you make a vow – you better keep it – or better be telling the truth before the Lord of heaven and earth.

But they were not slavishly following the Savoy or Westminster.

In fact a good part of this chapter in the LBCF comes to us from the FIRST London Baptist Confession of 1644 and 46.

They too wanted to distance themselves from the Anabaptist view that forbade taking an oath.

5. Many examples are in the Scriptures – but one should suffice:

Matthew 26:59-66

a. Putting Christ “under oath” was brilliant strategy. 62-63

Although Jesus was not legally compelled to testify against Himself, as a pious Jew, Jesus would take the oath, and the High Priest very seriously. He wouldn't say, “I refuse to answer, I do not take oaths.”

b. The charge was brilliantly laid out.

He couldn't just ask Jesus if He was the Messiah.

It wasn't against the law to say you were the Messiah.

Only time would tell if He were right or wrong.

He also couldn't just ask if Jesus were the Son of God.

Earlier Christ had stated that all Jews had a right to be called God's son (John 10:33-36).

But Caiaphas combined the two charges.

He wasn't asking simply if Jesus were a human Messiah (deliverer).

Or if Jesus was a son of God in the general Jewish sense.

He asked if Christ was **THE DIVINE MESSIAH**.

c. Christ in control v. 64

It is His time to speak – once again.

Christ knew when to speak and when to remain silent.

And here we have an absolute, clear, unequivocal testimony to the Deity of Christ.

In the Greek – it has the same meaning as ***YES, I AM***.

d. The charge was the perfect charge – BLASPHEMY 65-68

That would incite the Jews to anger (and it did).

Blasphemy carried the death penalty, and that's what they wanted.

But Pilate wouldn't care about charges like that.

He would consider it just “a Jewish thing”.

But, Caiaphas had ingeniously, done something else.

He had linked Jesus to being an earthly Messiah, a King, a rival to the Roman government, and Caesar himself.

Now, there was no need for witnesses.
There was no need for fanciful stories.
Christ was convicted on a unanimous vote, and all they had to do was wait for morning to break so they could send Him to Pilate.

What we see happening is a direct violation of what Jesus taught and James admonishes by the High Priest.

He used an oath – to try and trap Christ.
He wanted to twist words and win a battle of wits.

Instead – he unwillingly fulfilled the reason Christ came.
Why did all this happen?

Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save **His people** from their sins.

He went through that, because of the great love, wherewith **He loved us**.

Everything we are going in his passion account was for you and for me, Christian friend.

It was planned and ordained before the foundation of the world.

It was done **ON PURPOSE** for **A PURPOSE**.

6. The Meaning of James.

Very simple.

Say what you mean and mean what you say.

When you say YES – you mean yes – without hedging.

When you say NO – you mean no – without hedging.

If you don't know – you say you don't know.

Be trustworthy with your words. We shouldn't try to win arguments with half-facts and specious arguments.

Be open.
Be honest.
Be plain.

And if you are called upon by an authority to take an oath to tell the truth – or to promise to protect and serve -- do so -- before the Lord.

7. We should be cautious about throwing words around lightly like – “honestly” – or making promises we cannot keep. But, we might not be able to keep every promise and Paul often has what has been called his “witness formula”.

I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in **the** Holy Spirit,

What’s he mean?
He’s telling the truth. It’s important. It’s not a throwaway line.
He’s not avoiding the truth or shading the truth – but telling the whole truth.

II. The Relationship Between James and Jesus

Scriptural evidence shows that they grew up in the same household.
James was not a believer in Jesus until after the resurrection.

You can go back to the very first sermon in this series if you would like more biographical and Scriptural support.

HOWEVER – just because he wasn’t a believer – don’t think that he was unaware of the teachings of Jesus.

-- Christ didn’t say only what we have in the gospels.

-- But much of what we have in the gospels was probably said by Jesus many times and in many places before many different groups of people.

We find more than one incident where Mary, and Jesus’ brothers and sisters came to find him.

No doubt, many times they heard him speak.

James had many personal conversations of a non-confrontational nature with Jesus.

It would only make sense that after his conversion these things would come alive to him – in a way he had never understood before.

In a relatively short amount of time – we find him going from an unbeliever – to the leader of the Jerusalem church.

And it wasn't because he bore a physical resemblance to Jesus – although it is reported that he did – and we shouldn't be surprised if there was a resemblance.

It would be his piety, his understanding of the Scriptures and his zeal for the Lord (notice, he NEVER calls himself Jesus' brother) that would make it such that the church would recognize him as one of their leaders.

III. Some Texts in James that Parallel Jesus' Teachings

We won't go into a lengthy exposition – we have already talked about these verses as we have gone through James.

I have taken some of these allusions from an essay written by John Burns you can find on the internet entitled, "James, the Wisdom of Jesus".

2:3 – here is a subtle one.

If the worship service is to honor Christ – what difference does it make who occupies what we might call "the place of honor".

Christ castigated the Pharisees for seeking this kind of honor.

Christ taught us to go to the lower table and be asked to come higher.

And isn't this a part of at least loving your neighbor as yourself?

Six times in the gospels Christ alludes to Lev. 19:18. **James 1:8**

3:1 – Be not many teachers – stricter judgment

Read Matt 23 and see the teachers that do not really care about the people they should care for – but care only about themselves.

Christ warned about shepherds who didn't care for the sheep in John 10.

The student should strive to be like his teacher – true
But – the one who would be the greatest – must be the servant of all.

Turn to Matt 12 – a related idea to 3:1 and also our key verse today of 5:12

Matt. 12:36 – words are important.

Think how many times James has told us that – dealing with the tongue.
If you can control your tongue -- you can control the whole man.

In v. 37 I hope you would understand – Jesus is not teaching justification by words.

In this case justified means “shown to be righteous”.

It is not the declaration of righteousness that Paul speaks about
because of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Turn to Matthew 7:7-12

Let me read **James 4:1-6** – while you look at these verses.

These are not exact quotes.

As James usually does – he paraphrases and rearranges.

Matthew 6:25-34

We should be able to hear a glimpse of James 4:1-6 here.

And James makes a startling application.

⁴ Adulterers and ^[b] adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship
with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a
friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Adultery is not just an act.

Adultery is the ultimate betrayal.

It is not divided affections.

Adultery is the total abandonment of proper affections.

Throughout this passage – Christ compares the way WE should think and act
with the way the worldly think.

What do THEY seek – what do THEY set their affections upon?
What should WE seek – **Matt 6:33**

James uses adultery.

Christ uses “Gentiles” – or those without God.

The ideas are very much the same.

James 4:8

Draw near

God must not only be obeyed – v. 7

God must be worshipped.

*They that worship God must worship him in spirit and in truth –
for the father seeketh such to worship him.*

Cleanse your hands

OT allusion of the priest drawing near to the
Tabernacle/Temple.

This included ritual washings.

James is obviously talking in a spiritual sense.

Christ taught the spiritual necessity of “drawing near” and the
uselessness of cleansing ones outside and being filthy inside.

Repentance is in view in the 5 imperatives of 4:9

We find parallels in the Sermon on the Mount.

v. 10 – Humble yourself

Christ taught this in many ways.

Taking the lower seat at the table.

Christian servant-hood.

Christ washing the disciples feet – shortly before being
displayed as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Suffice it to say – we could go on and on.

James was not influenced that much by Paul.

He might have written his epistle before he knew much about Paul.
But his teaching does not contradict Paul.

Paul learned from Christ.
James learned from Christ.
Peter learned from Christ.
John learned from Christ.

Scholars often look for THE SOURCE of the teaching.
In Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

What about you?
Is Christ your teacher – Your master – Your Lord?
Is Christ your All in All?
To live is Christ – to die is gain.

But to die without Christ is death – and hell forever.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ – and you shall be saved.

Christ said, “I am the way, the truth and the life – no man comes to the father except by me.”

He died to save sinners.
Sinner friend – that should give you great hope – and cause you to go to Him.

Have you REPENTED of your SINS and turned to Christ in faith, believing?

Prayer
Hymn 188
Benediction: James 5:11