

Faith Submits

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 0 0] It is wonderful to be here with you. I see some blurry eyes, which maybe means there was a football game on late into the evening last night, but it's great to be here together. Folks, if you have a Bible, please would you turn with me to the book of James and to chapter 3.

And just before we begin our time this morning, let's pause just for a moment, just to pray and just commit this time together to God together. Let's pray. Father, we would think of the words of that song that we sang, draw me close to you, never let me go.

I lay it all down again. Father, we pray, Lord, that you would come and bless our time together this morning. Father, as we turn to your words, Lord, I pray that my words would be your words.

Father, I pray that your spirit would come and would teach us from this text. Would he illuminate, would he light up the Lord Jesus as we meet him in your word?

So, Father, that's our prayer. And we make it through the wonderful name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

So, my wife, Alex, as many of you know, is training to be a GP.

[1 : 2 0] And I remember when she was studying for her practical exams, she announced that she needed a volunteer to help her as a patient doing practice interviews. Now, we were just married at this stage.

And I was keen for her to see that she'd married an encouraging and supportive husband. So, I put up my hand and I volunteered to act as the patients in these interviews.

And we were there for hours and hours and hours as we worked our way through this textbook. And I think I must have played almost every patient that I could have imagined.

I mean, I played, I wrote it down, Mr. Black, the teacher who was prone to sleepwalking. And I played Mrs. Brown, the pensioner, who was struggling to read her daily newspaper.

Now, why did we do that? Why did we spend hours and hours and hours doing that? Well, Alex, like any good doctor, she wanted to hone and develop the skills that she needed to get good at diagnosing.

[2 : 2 5] Friends, in our verses today, there's a diagnosis going on. This is James the doctor in full flow. And his patient is this church that he's writing to.

Now, we've seen that over the last five weeks or so as we've studied this letter. Together. We've caught a glimpse of what the life of this church was like. And it isn't coming out too good.

This is a church behaving badly. The letter's big theme, double-mindedness. That's been James' big push in this letter.

What is he said? He said, stop being people who say one thing and go out and do another. Stop being people who show such blatant favoritism.

Stop being people who pick and choose which ones of God's laws that you want to obey and those that you do not want to obey. And stop being people who are so blasphemous and who are so destructive with your words.

[3 : 3 4] But if anything, James has torn up until this point. It's been firm, but it has been gentle. I mean, look how he frames all of these things.

Chapter 1, verse 2. My brothers. Chapter 2, verse 1. My brothers. Chapter 3, verse 1.

My brothers. But folks, what we see in our verses that we are about to read is that James well and truly turns up the heat.

I mean, he moves from the hug to the headlock. And chapter 4, verse 4, look at what he calls them. You adulterous people.

You see, James here, he's got this scalpel in. The patient's skin peeled back. And he's going for the root problem. And as we look at this diagnosis, folks, what we will see is that this church isn't suffering from man flu.

[4 : 40] This church is suffering from an infectious gangrene that, if not treated and addressed, it's going to cause this church to rot away.

So let's read our verses together. And as we read, I wonder if you can spot James's diagnosis. So this is James chapter 3, verses, sorry, James 3, 13 to 4, verse 12.

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from heaven, but it is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure.

[5 : 57] Then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness. What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from the desires that battle within you?

You desire, but you do not have, so you kill. You covet, but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.

When you ask, you do not receive because you ask with the wrong motives that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people.

Don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, any who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

[7 : 00] Or do you think the scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? But he gives us more grace.

This is why scripture says God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble. Submit yourselves then to God.

Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up.

Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it.

[8 : 03] When you judge the law, you are not keeping it but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one lawgiver and judge. The one who is able to save and destroy.

But you, who are you to judge your neighbor? Amen. This is God's word to us this morning. So let's walk our way through this doctor-patient consultation process.

What are the symptoms that this church are exhibiting? Well, we see from these verses, I think, three symptoms that this church are showing.

Symptom number one at verse 16 of chapter 3. There is disorder and evil practice. Now, the immediate context of verses 13 to 17 is teaching.

That's what James has been addressing in verses 1 to 12 of chapter 3. And he's been warning them as they clamber over each other, competing for the airtime that teaching is going to give them.

[9 : 12] He says, don't rush into being a teacher. Stop and examine your own heart before you share with everyone else your so-called wisdom and understanding.

If you can't control your tongue, then who are you kidding, thinking that you can teach other people? And folks, the picture that we get is that in the background of this church, there's jealousy bubbling, rivalries developing, and there's restlessness building.

Symptom number two at verse 1 of chapter 4. There is fighting and quarreling. And this seems to be the real issue in this church.

There is a culture of bitterness, harshness. There is finger pointing and there is folding of arms, refusing to budge.

And there is talking, talking, talking, and louder talking, leading to raised voices and raised fists. As people insist on their own way and as they refuse to listen and reason with each other.

[10 : 28] I mean, there is just a complete lack of love and harmony in this church. This is a church folks who are currently at each other's throats.

Symptom number three. Slandering and judging. These people are gossiping. They are going out of their way to start rumors about people that they don't like.

And they're speaking about people behind their backs. There is developing a real condemnatory church culture. Criticizing the speck in other people's eyes, all the while ignoring the log in their own.

And they are judging one another. Which I think in the context means that they are deciding who is and who isn't a real Christian. And they are speculating at the eternal destinies of each other. Which James reminds them is a role that only God the log ever plays. The symptoms give you the picture here folks.

[11 : 40] This church reeks of pride and it reeks of selfishness. This church is divided. It is fractured.

And it is tearing itself apart. And if it continues on the trajectory that it's on. It's going to spectacularly implode.

Now how does James diagnose those symptoms? Well if you look at verse four of chapter four. You find that James the doctor is in absolutely no doubt.

That underneath the surface. This church is suffering from worldly-itis. Now we're back to the central idea of this letter.

Double-mindedness. That the people in this church are talking the Christian talk. They're doing the religious stuff. But their hearts are yearning after the things of the world.

[12 : 47] Not the things of God. They are meant to be God's distinct people. Living as a shining light in the midst of the world's darkness.

But actually. When you lift the lid off their lives. They're just like everyone else around them. Same ambitions. Same motives.

Same desires. It was interesting studying this passage this week. The word desire at verse two. The original Greek is the word hedonai.

Which is where we get our English words hedonist. Pleasure seeking. But these people aren't seeking pleasure in God. The picture here is that the passions of the people in this church.

Are for the things that the world has to offer them. And I think that's what James means at verse three. When he's talking about prayer.

[13 : 50] That you do not have. Because you do not ask. So their proud and stubborn hearts simply will refuse to pray. And then the things that you do ask for says James.

You don't get. Now why do you not get? Because you ask with bad motives in your heart. Now I want you to think back to the time when you were a kid.

And you wanted to do something. But to do it. It required the permission of your parents. And you'd had that conversation before with them.

And it didn't go too well for you. But you thought that you'd give it another shot. Just in case they happened to have changed their mind. And you were suspiciously kind to them.

You mowed the garden. You washed the dishes. Your room was extra tidy. Before picking your exact moment to ask your parents. And then still being met with a resounding no.

[14 : 50] That is what James is saying here to these people. You don't ask God. You don't pray to God about your heart's desires.

And the things that you want. Because not only do you fear the answer that you'll get. But you know what he's already said. You know what he has expressly commanded.

But so great is your selfishness. That you don't even bother to ask God. Or stop yourself from doing it. You just go ahead and do it anyway. You are the rebellious teenage boy.

Who has snuck out his window to be at the nightclub with his friends. You know what God has said about loving your neighbor. You know what God has said about how you are to treat one another.

You know what God has said to you about coveting. About jealously wanting the things that somebody else has. And yet you still go ahead and do it anyway. You are people driven by earthly wisdom says James.

[16 : 04] And that's why he uses that phrase at verse 4. Probably one of the strongest rebukes that we find anywhere in the New Testament. You adulterous people.

You cheating people. You two-timing people. All the way through the Bible, that's how the relationship between God and his people is described.

It's like a marriage. God is the faithful, loving husband. And he calls his people to be his faithful, loving wife.

But history would tell us time and time and time again. That while God remains the unchanging, faithful, loving, sacrificial, gracious husband.

Who is the same yesterday, today and forever. His people's hearts are continually flirting and desiring the things of the world. You know the word adulterer that James uses there in the original Greek, it's in the feminine form.

[17:09] And he quite deliberately does it like that. His Jewish audience, they would know their Old Testament. They would know their Old Testament prophets. And so the mention of a female adulterer bring to mind Old Testament Israel.

And in particular, the prophet Hosea. God commands Hosea to marry a prostitute called Gomer. And Gomer's recurrent unfaithfulness so graphically and painfully illustrates how God sees his people's constant spiritual unfaithfulness to him.

As they give him their words of love and of flattery. But then they run off to the pagan temples down the roads. And they worship the so-called other gods that everyone else is worshipping.

As far as God is concerned, the message is quite clear. That idolatry is adultery. Israel's divided hearts and double minds.

[18:19] And that's what God had said to that generation of his people. And James says that the comparisons between the two, between that generation and this generation, they're uncanny.

Your discreet love affair with the world. Dr. James doesn't need to run any further tests. He doesn't need a second opinion.

For him, it is so evident by the disgusting way in which this church are behaving towards one another that the cause is worldly items.

And folks, this is where we need to pause. We just need to park the bus just for a minute. And we need to sit in Dr. James' chair. Now, if he were to do a diagnosis of your life, if he were to get out his scalpel, if he was to peel back your skin, and he was to have a look inside, what would he see in your life?

If he were to examine what your life is like inside these walls, and compare it with your life outside these walls, what would he see?

[19:42] If he was to look at your thought life, if he was to look at your personal life, and if he was to compare it to the life that everyone sees, would he see a consistent life?

Would he see consistency, or would he see compromised men and women who are riddled with worldly items? Now, folks, as I've studied this passage this week, that is the challenge.

Because, when we look at this church, and we see their symptoms, are we any different? I don't think we are that much far removed from what we see going on in this church.

And can I make the observation at this stage that there is such a close link between our relationship with God and our relationships with other people?

That's been such a central idea in this letter of James already, that there should be a holy consistency to the life of God's people. You flick back to chapter 3, you see James saying exactly that.

[20:58] That you can't be praising God with your lips one minute, and then as soon as you get outside, you go cursing the same brothers and sisters that you've just been with. That's just not on.

Because their attitude towards people and our attitude towards people, it reveals an awful lot about what our attitude is to God.

You know, if you find yourself exhibiting any of these symptoms, can I encourage you to do a self-diagnosis? If you find yourself bitter towards anybody in this church, if you find yourself agitated, if you find yourself impatient, if you find yourself bad-mouthing somebody in here or having a critical spirit, then God tells you right here in his word to stop.

To examine your own heart and see that the problem is actually something within that you need to repent of and bring yourself to pray that God in his mercy would change you.

Folks, I know that is so true in my own life. that the things that get me riled, the things that get me going, actually, when I stop to think about it and when I stop to examine my own heart, I realize so often, in fact, all the time, I realize that the problem is in here.

[22:33] You know, that seems to be the problem with this church, that they are nowhere with each other corporately because they are nowhere with God individually.

these people always view the problem as being out there and never in here because worldly-itis has well and truly got under the skin of these people.

It is rife in the life of this church and if it's not treated, it's going to kill this church. So what does James the doctor prescribe?

For worldly-itis? What is going to be the thing that will transform the life of this church and it will transform the lives and relationships of the individuals in the church?

Well, the prescription that James gives is found at verse 6 of chapter 4. God's God's God's God's God's God's God's undeserved favor, God's blessing and kindness.

[23 : 53] It is available to them if, and there is a massive if here folks that we need to see, if they will humble themselves before God.

If they will get down low on their knees and repent of their selfishness. Now, why is that the case? Well, it's spelled out in such black and white language at verse 6.

Now, I know memory verses have gone out of fashion, but if you wanted a memory verse for this week, if you wanted a memory verse for all of your life, then can I suggest go for this one? One of the most sobering verses in the Bible, verse 6, that God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

You see, what James calls for here in the life of this church is humility. Now, I think it's fair to say that humility isn't an attribute that is envied in our culture.

And it certainly wasn't valued in the culture that this church are operating in. It's a word that was associated with lowliness, of weakness, and of grovelling.

[25 : 17] But James says, folks, that that is exactly the heart stance before God. That not only is the appropriate and right one, but it's the one that if you adopt, God promises that he will see and he will shower with his grace.

And of course, this humility that James calls for, we see it most fully in the life of Jesus. That Jesus humbled himself by leaving the glories of heaven to come down to earth to save us.

He humbled himself while he was here by washing his disciples' feet. And he humbled himself ultimately to death on a cross.

Taking the punishment, dying the death that you and I deserve to die because of our sin against the holy God and accrediting us with his perfect life.

The Bible uses the word righteousness. And because of his life of humility, because of his life of obedience, because of his life of faithfulness and single-mindedness, folks, we are the recipients of amazing grace.

[26 : 36] And not only has God saved us by his son, but when we gave our lives to God, the Bible would say that he adopted us as his children.

And he put his spirit in us. His spirit in us, not to be a casual lodger, not to be a roommate that we wave to on the stairs, but right into our hearts to be a permanent dweller.

That is the gospel. And brothers and sisters, can I encourage you that if we truly capture that with our hearts and our minds, then it leaves absolutely no room for us to be proud.

It leaves no wiggle room for self-exaltation, but rather it should produce in us deep gratitude and deep humility.

But James says here that God's grace, it wasn't exhausted at salvation, in salvation, sorry. James tells his readers that God's grace, it is a Niagara Falls for them to sit under and swim in.

[27 : 50] Because God desires to give them more grace. And God desires to give them more of himself.

even though they look undesirable, and folks, let's be honest, even though we look so undesirable, God gives more grace.

God wants his people for himself, warps and all. How good is God? God. I mean, this church is on the brink.

But James tells them the wonderful truth that God's grace is their only hope. But what a hope it is. And folks, listen, I don't know whether you paid attention here or not, but if you haven't, can I say that you jump in here and remember this phrase.

It is a wonderful hope, God's grace, because God's grace is greater, deeper, and wider than his people's failings, unfaithfulness, and weakness.

[28 : 59] God's grace is greater. Friends, can I urge you never to doubt that God is willing and desires to graciously provide the things that his children need.

He doesn't withhold any good gift that his children need. Not that they want, but that they need. But we also need to see the warning here of how God views a proud and a stubborn human heart.

God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. So what is the management of this prescription that Dr. James prescribes?

So how is this humility that we've been looking at, how is it going to play out in their daily lives? And how is it going to play out in ours as well? Because James isn't saying, take the grace pill and kick back, go to the armchair, and everything's going to work out.

They're going to have to work at this. And if you've got your Bibles there, just follow with me the imperatives that James lists at verses 7 to 10 of chapter 4.

[30 : 19] This is what it's going to look like. Submit yourselves to God. So James is calling them to bow the knee, raise the white flag of surrender, stop rebelling, and stop resisting God in the way that you currently are.

you know what he said. You know how he has commanded you to behave to one another. So do it. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Now that word resist, it's a military metaphor. And James is telling them to say no to ungodliness.

Say no to gossiping. Say no to the devil when he tries to get a hold of your tongue.

and of your thoughts. But rather to resist him and stand firm. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

Friends, what a wonderful promise that God makes here. That God is lovingly desperate that these running religious rebels, they turn to him and receive his grace.

[31 : 34] love for his returning son. Now this is the heart of the loving father. That while his son, the running rebel, who had openly rejected him to his face, as his son does a U-turn and makes his way back home, what does it say?

The father sees him a long distance off and runs out to meet him. such as the father's great love for his returning son. Now hear the promise this morning, folks, that God makes to us in his words.

A word for you this morning, if you currently have your back towards God, that if you draw near to him, he will draw near to you.

wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn, and wail.

Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Now what James is saying here to these people is that you need to get right with God.

[32 : 45] You should be weeping, you should be crying over your sin-riddled hearts. And what it's doing to this church. You should mourn the state of affairs that are currently going on in your church.

And as they do these things, folks, as they humble themselves, amazingly, God will lift them up. God will exalt them.

And God will honor them. And why? Why? Because God's grace is greater, deeper, and wider than his people's failings, unfaithfulness, and weakness.

so the patient has been diagnosed, and the prescription has been given. And as we draw our time to our close this morning, let's see what James says health is going to look like.

How do we know this patient is being rehabilitated? So as God pours out his grace into their lives individually and corporately, what fruit should they see in their lives?

[34 : 02] Well, back in chapter one, we saw James encourage this church that if any of them lacks wisdom, to pray and to ask God who gives generously.

Now, we so often read that and we read it as asking for divine wisdom, for guidance. So making life's big decisions. Now, of course, there is an application there, but I think James has much more in mind divine wisdom for conduct.

So wisdom for how they are to behave rightly towards one another and how they are to live a life that is pleasing and honoring to God. So in contrast to the earthly wisdom, the disorder and the evil practice that currently characterizes this church, here at verses 17 and 18, James describes for us what divine wisdom is going to look like in their lives.

Humble, self-sacrificing, peaceful, merciful, reasonable, and gentle.

Wonderful characteristics that James encourages them to adorn and wear. And we'll finish, folks, by reading these verses together.

[35 : 26] And I encourage you, just like I was challenged this week in my own life, do you see divine wisdom on show in your life? And if you don't, can I ask you to seriously pray to God who gives generously and who gives graciously?

Let's read these verses together as we close. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness. Let's pray together, folks, as we close.

these are the ones I look on with favor, those who are humble and contrite in spirit and who tremble at my words.

Father, we come before you, Lord, as people knowing that we have unclean hearts. Father, that our thoughts are full of unclean things, that our hearts are wicked and deceitful.

[37 : 02] But Father, thank you this morning that you've reminded us in your words that you give more grace. And so, Father, it's that grace that we throw ourselves on.

Father, we ask for that spirit of humility. We ask for that wisdom from above as we seek to witness for you, as we seek to live for you in this world this week, we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.