

James 1:12-18 | Mark Minnella

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[0 : 00] Raise your hand if you ever did anything wrong, if you ever sinned. If your hand is not up you're a liar so put it up now.

! Keep your hand up if when you did something wrong you blamed someone else for it. Like your brother, your sister, maybe a friend or a classmate, maybe a cousin who has the same name as you.

Some of you know my cousin Mark. We have the exact same name, Mark Allen Minello. And I found myself at Lindbergh High School for one year.

Mark was a year ahead of me and we were both in the same big high school with the same name. My mom and his mom accidentally liked the same name. And I remember I got called into the principal's office and I said, Yeah, it's not me, it's my cousin, you want him.

And he found me and said, what did you do that for? I said, well I didn't want to get in trouble. And I, you know, I mean... Today we're gonna see that James is gonna tell us just whose fault it is when we sin.

[1 : 11] And when Kirk gets done doing that, he can play my little video. Are you ready for it? Yeah, I'm ready for the video. All right. I didn't know you were gonna hand them out. I thought somebody else would do that.

Is that my fault too? Yeah, that's all right. This is a funny video about making excuses. Always blame somebody else.

Okay, let's look at our passage. This morning we're looking at James chapter 1 in verses 12 through 18. It says, Blessed is the one who preserves under trial, because having stood the test of time, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. When tempted, no one should say, God is tempting me, for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone. But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.

Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

[2 : 26] He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created. Let's pray. Father, we're thankful for your word.

We're thankful that it is instructive, and more thankful even that it gives us the words of eternal life. And so, Lord, as we approach this passage, I pray, Father, that you would speak to each of our hearts, and give us what we need to hear from you, so that we can grow to be more like you.

I put the outline of all of chapter one on your handout. That's for past and future reference. We must remember that these letters were meant to be read all at once.

You know, James wrote this letter, and you would sit down and read it all at once. But here at Bethel, we take a little section and chop it up, and we have a week in between. So, we pick up where James has been talking about persecution.

James was probably one of the earliest of the New Testament writers, maybe perhaps 15 or 20 years after the resurrection. So, for a little bit of historical context, we'll go back to Pentecost.

[3 : 40] And Acts chapter two tells us that there were Jews from every nation under heaven. They were in Jerusalem for the feast. And Peter preaches, and miraculously, everyone understands in their own native language.

Three thousand people get saved that day, and then shortly afterwards, five thousand more. Many of these new Christians, they hung around a while so that they could learn.

So many, in fact, they had trouble feeding them all. And then in Acts chapter four, Peter and John were hauled in, and they had to face the Sanhedrin. That's the Jewish ruling council. So, they brought them in before all the Jewish leaders, and the Jewish leaders, they threatened them. They said, you can't speak or teach about Jesus anymore. When they didn't listen, they were put in prison. God does a miracle. He opens the prison gates and lets them out. And Christianity continues to grow.

[4 : 43] And so does the persecution. If we remember the book of Acts, that's the book we just finished. You might remember then chapter seven.

If you don't remember, go like this. That was one of my passages. But you might remember that when Stephen was stoned, the Jews, they brought Stephen. Stephen was preaching the truth about Jesus, and they brought him before the Sanhedrin. And he gives them a whole history of the nation of Israel and how they disobeyed throughout the years. And he tells them how Jesus is the promised Messiah. Well, the Jewish leaders, they don't want to hear that. Many of them were the same ones that asked for Jesus to be crucified. And so they stoned Stephen to death. The Christians now are scattered. And most of them go back to their own country. And they took the good news about Jesus with them. This, this is who James is writing the letter to.

[5 : 45] These, these mostly Jewish, new Christians who are being persecuted for their faith. You don't have to raise your hand, but how many of you here thought that, that when you got saved, the tough times would be over.

You know, just smooth sailing all the way to heaven. Yeah, that's not what the scripture teaches, is it? John chapter 16 and verse 33, Jesus says, I've told you these things that in me, you may have peace.

In the world, you'll have trouble, but take heart. I have overcome the world. Have you ever listened to any of the messages by these, these prosperity preacher guys?

They tell you that God wants you to be healthy, wealthy, and have everything on this earth. And, and you know, yeah, please send your donations in now. That's not what the scripture teaches, is it?

God wants us to be blessed. And our passage today, it starts out with blessed. Blessed, what does that mean? Or, or some people say blessed. I guess that makes you sound more spiritual.

[6 : 48] I don't know. But, uh, I brought this big Young's analytical concordance for you. That shows how spiritual I am and how studious I am. And I looked up blessed and there's like two big pages of it here.

And, uh, and in the new Testament, there's 500 times it's used in the scripture, 50 times it's used in the scripture. 50 times in the new Testament. And in our passage here, it means this.

It means happy. That's what it means. It means happy or joyful. You could work out with this thing. I'm telling you. So happy or joyful.

Verse 12 here is, is sandwiched between, uh, what, what I would call persecution from outside sources. That was all the people against the Christians and then temptations from inside sources. That's us. Our own problems. Okay. So trials outside temptations inside. James here reminds the people that the person who perseveres and stands against these trials and temptations is blessed, happy, joyful.

[7 : 58] And then he mentioned the crown. There are seven crowns mentioned in the new Testament and the rewards for different things, but we're not going down that trail.

That's a whole nother story. Uh, but suffice it to say that, uh, here James is telling people that if you persevere, you will receive a crown. It's called the crown of life.

I want to take a moment to talk about the difference between eternal life, which is a free gift and rewards from God for things done after a person is saved.

Remember that James wrote this letter to believers. Chapter one and verse two, my brothers here in our passage, verse 16, my dear brothers.

Brothers. In fact, 16 times in this short letter, James uses the term brothers. So I want to be clear because many religions then and now would say that the way to heaven is by good works.

[9 : 08] It can be confusing and it is confusing for some people who read this letter as a way to get right with God. But this letter is only written to one group of people, to people who are already saved.

If you're here today and you're not sure that you're in God's family or if you're not sure that you've had your sins paid for. Well, then this book is not for you. It's not. You should read the book of John. John says clearly that he wrote so that people would know how to get to heaven. Now you may hear that there are different kinds of people in the world, but God says there's only two kinds of people in the world.

Those that are on their way to heaven and those that are on their way to the lake of fire. I have a little video that we can watch about that.

Funny, but true. John chapter 20 and verses 30 and 31. It says this, Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

[10:15] But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. Eternal life. You want to know how to get saved?

Read the book of John. Revelation chapter 2 and verse 10. Do not be afraid of what you're about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you and you will suffer persecution. Be faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. Now this is talking about the future, a future time, but it's the same crown that James is talking about, the crown of life.

Not eternal life, but a reward for being faithful and persevering in the time of trouble. At the very end of the Bible, as if God is saying, in case you don't understand, here it is.

Revelation chapter 22, verse 12 says this. Jesus says, look, I'm coming soon. My reward is with me. And I will give to each person according to what they've done.

[11:19] That's to believers. That's rewards. Verse 17. The spirit and the bride say, come. And let the one who hears say, come. Let the one who is thirsty, come.

And let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life. It's a free gift. So eternal life is a free gift. Rewards are for believers, for work done.

Not the other way around. Some of you that went through this, remember this book. This is a book by a guy named Lucas Kitchen. And it spells out the difference between salvation verses in the scripture and discipleship verses.

You see, we say the Bible wasn't written in a cultural vacuum. The Bible was written in a dress, like James wrote this letter to a specific group of people. We can't just rip it out of context and start applying it where we want.

And so when we look at the scripture, we need to study the scripture in the context in which it's written. And so that can be confusing for some people and has been and still continues to be.

[12:22] God says this. If you're not saved, your good works don't count for anything.

Listen to Isaiah 64 6. All of us have become like one who is unclean. Now what unclean meant in Bible times is that meant you were a leper.

Okay, they had leprosy. And if you were a leper in the Old Testament times and even New Testament times back then when leprosy was still around, you had to walk around crying out unclean because leprosy was contagious.

You could give it to other people. And so the lepers were ostracized. They had to live outside the city and they had to walk around yelling unclean. And this is what Isaiah is talking about.

It says if you're a sinner that you're unclean. And it says this. All our righteous acts are like filthy rags. And the filthy rags would be the rags that the lepers wrapped around their fingers and toes that would rot away.

[13:29] It's kind of a disgusting reference. But here's the thing. If we as people would approach God with our good works, this is how disgusting it is to God.

It's like saying here's these bloody rags. These are my good works. And you want to let me into heaven. God says no. That's not the way. John 14 6.

Jesus says I am the way. The truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. So that was a problem with Cain and Abel. You look at Cain and Abel.

Right? One of them brings the lamb. That's what he's supposed to do. The other one brings a bunch of fruits and goes, look what I did. We can't approach God with our good works.

They don't pay for sin. As we move on from verse 12, which as I said, sort of separates the ideas of persecution from the outside versus temptations from the inside.

[14:30] He says that we can't say it's from God. But in verse 14, it says this. It is our own evil desire. While it's true that God created all things, God did not create evil.

Some of the angels rebelled and people rebelled and we can't blame God. He gave us a free will. We can choose to obey or not. Now, if we belong to God, then he says there's rewards for obedience, both now and in the afterlife.

If you're a member of God's family, you can take comfort in the fact that God knows what you're going through. And I know some of you are going through some pretty bad stuff right now. Well, here's the thing.

God doesn't say you won't go through it. But what does he say? I'll go through it with you. I'll be with you. Psalm 23, 4. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, or some of your translations might say the valley of the shadow of death.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You see the picture here is we're sheep, right?

[15:41] But Jesus is the good shepherd. And he's watching out for us. And he's going to take us through some tough times, but he's always going to be with us. And so whether it's external persecution, or even our own evil desires that are from inside, if we're faithful in this life, they're rewards.

Now, and later in heaven. This now brings us to the last part of our passage. He begins with, don't be deceived, my dear brothers.

This is probably because James is refuting some error that was circulating at the time. Most of these letters in the New Testament were written not only to encourage people, but also to refute error that was going around.

Okay. And so there were probably people that would blame God for their temptations instead of blaming themselves. And so James beginning in verse 17, it will tell us that all good things come from God, not the government.

He refers to the heavenly lights, showing God as the creator of all things. You know, I was thinking, not very often for me, but have you ever been out in the country, away from all the city lights, where there's no artificial light, on a cloudless night, and you look up, and you see the stars?

[17:04] Man, they're bright, huh? I don't get to see them like that from my backyard. Even if I turn my lights off, the neighbors got them on, I got a dusk to dawn across the street. It's not the same. But man, you get out in a country where there's no artificial light, and the stars are just magnificent.

This is written when they didn't have electricity. These people got to see that amazing show every night. John 1, 3.

All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. And then James mentions that God cannot change. He doesn't change.

Verse 18 says, he chose to give us birth through the word of truth. Over 80 verses in the New Testament show us that God chose us, we did not choose God.

Ephesians 1, 4. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world. 1 Peter 2, 9. But you are chosen people. John 3, 16.

[18:05] For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. John 6, 37.

All those the Father gives to me come to me, and whoever comes to me, I will never drive away. 1 John 4, 10 says, this is love, not that we love God, but that he loves us, and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

And there are many, many more. But how did God choose us? It says through the word of truth. Through the word of truth.

Romans 10, 17 says, consequently, faith comes from hearing, and the message is heard through the word of truth. That's the Bible.

John 1, 1 says, in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. So we have the written word, and we have the word that became flesh.

[19:09] And that's how God communicates to us. Through the written word, and through his Son, Jesus, who came to earth and became a man. And that's how God says, in conclusion, I think this passage teaches us a couple of things.

One is that when we do wrong stuff, we don't get to blame it on anyone else. And secondly, that our great God, the creator of all things, says that we will be blessed if we hold up under trials and temptations.

And we will be blessed by going to him. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the encouragement in this letter, James, that whether we would face persecution from the outside, or whether even we're drawn away with our own evil thoughts and desires. Lord, that you are there for us, and that you are with us. And Father, more than that, that you sent Jesus, who lived a perfect life, gave it up for us, and rose again to guarantee that we can have eternal life by faith in him. We'll thank you for that. Amen. Amen.