

James 5:19-20

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[0:00] Take your copy of God's Word and join me in James chapter 5. Our text for today is James chapter 5, verse 19 and 20, which you'll note are the last two verses of the book.

So we are concluding our verse-by-verse study of the book of James, which is always a little bittersweet. We have enjoyed our time together. I hope that's been true for you. I've enjoyed our time in James.

It's also a little exciting to look toward what is next. So as you're getting there, I want to tell you what's next in our plan for preaching, which is always, to be sure, a little tentative.

But as it stands right now, what we're planning on doing across this summer is doing some selected psalms. We're going to preach through some psalms. And right in the middle, I think it's the second Sunday of July, some months ago I preached a sermon on building a resilient church culture, what it was going to take for the church to stand in the face of soft totalitarianism and kind of the rising swell of push against the church.

I'm going to re-preach that sermon and then talk across the following weeks about the specific things that we believe we need to be doing together as a church to build a resilient church culture that will weather the coming storm.

[1:28] And then we'll do a couple more psalms. And then in the fall, we're going to begin an exposition of the book of Romans. So I'll spare you all the details of what that will look like, but be praying for us as we're preparing both this summer, preaching psalms, preparing that study about resilient church culture, and then on into the fall, our future plans.

So today, though, today before us is James chapter 5, verse 19 and 20. The conclusion of James' letter to Jews, specifically his original audience who had professed faith in Jesus Christ and had been dispersed across the Roman world.

You can see chapter 1 and verse 1. James has developed across this letter the argument that if one has placed saving faith in Jesus Christ, then that faith will be evidenced in the way that person lives.

So not works that save, but works that give evidence of that salvation. You see, he recognizes that it is altogether possible to say that you have Jesus as your Savior, and yet to functionally deny him as your Lord.

And these two things are mutually inclusive. They must go together. That's a very good word for the Southeast, right?

[2:53] People who may call themselves Christian because they were born into a Christian household or because they may have been baptized in a church, and yet their life gives no evidence to God changing their hearts.

These two things go together. Jesus as Savior and as Lord. You can only have Jesus on his terms. We have recorded for us in John chapter 14 and verse 15, Jesus saying, If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

And James says it this way in James chapter 2 and verse 26. Faith apart from works is dead. It is no faith at all.

And he has been concerned all throughout his writing that someone might think they are a Christian and turn out not to be. He states in chapter 1 and verse 22, Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

He spends much of this letter then telling his readers how their lives ought to look. There are some 60 commands in the book of James. If, in fact, they have been saved.

[4:16] Not because he intends to stand over them as a judge. This is not the point. It's not what James is trying to accomplish. But because he loves them. And he wants them to have confidence that they are in Christ.

With this in mind, I just love the way that this letter concludes. It's abrupt. We're going to read it in a moment. It's abrupt.

He does not sign off. There is no postscript. But in the last two verses, he turns his readers' attention away from themselves, assessment of how they're living, how they ought to stay in the way of Christ, and sets their attention on how they ought to go after the one who has wandered. I think this, for us, this morning is a very good word. So James chapter 5, verse 19 and 20. Before I read it, I remind you, beloved, that this is God's word to us.

It's for us today, for our benefit. It was written for his glory and our good. And so we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and to obey its commands.

[5:26] James chapter 5, verse 19 and 20. My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Now, we're going to consider this text today through three observations and five applications. So if you're a note taker, it's where we're headed. Three observations first and then five.

Three observations. So first, the observations. And the first observation is this. It must be noted that James assumes that the wanderer is a Christian.

And I think this should be of some encouragement to us. He says, my brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth.

He refers to them collectively as brothers. And ladies, this does not exclude you. All the brother language in the scripture most readily is about inheritance.

[6:34] So this includes you too. And it points out that the wanderer has wandered from somewhere. There's a place that the wanderer has come from. And that is specifically from among you.

So this wanderer is a person who has said to have faith in Jesus Christ and yet is now finding themselves in a way that is not the way of the truth.

So this text is not particularly about evangelism. Although when pursuing a wanderer from the truth, in reminding them of the truth, we may become party to their initial conversion.

It's altogether possible that somebody would become a Christian having once thought they were a Christian. And we'll talk more about that in some coming moments. But first observation, it must be noted that James assumes that the wanderer is a Christian.

They have made a profession of faith in Christ. Second observation, regardless of the status of their soul, the person James has in mind has wandered from the truth.

[7:45] So the truth was the place that they have wandered away from, from the truth to falsehood. James says nothing about the particular circumstances of the wandering.

Neither does he say anything about the particular methods of bringing the wanderer back. And I think that he is particularly ambiguous as there are in many ways that someone can wander from the truth.

Under the inspiration of the Spirit, James means for us to have a category to think within, but then to understand that there's lots of ways that someone can wander from the truth.

Perhaps they have erred in doctrine or perhaps in some matter of obedience. And it ought to be understood that right doctrine leads to right practice and wrong living will often produce justifying wrong doctrine.

The two will feed each other in a vicious loop unless that loop is broken and it must be divinely broken.

[8:54] This wandering verse 20 tells us is sin. You shouldn't mistake it as anything else. It is in fact sin because James says whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering.

So our text has a wanderer, a person who has claimed to be a Christian, but is now living in contradiction to that claim.

This wandering is not unknown to us. We in our own hearts can feel the wandering prone to wander.

Lord, I feel it prone to leave the God I love. None of us are perfect. But here James has in mind a person who is visibly wandering, a person who is in great danger.

And we have all known someone who has professed faith in Jesus Christ and has wandered from that profession of faith. Perhaps somebody who even now thinks they're in Christ and yet everything about their life screams that they're not.

[10:05] And we can often treat this as confusing or shocking. The Bible has a lot to say about the false convert, about the apostate.

And it's doing so to warn us, to help us to be careful that we remain in the way of the truth. Jesus in Mark chapter 4 kind of normalizes this for us, teaches us that we ought to expect it to be the case as we walk in this world.

So if you would, please join me in Mark chapter 4. Keep James on your thumb and go to Mark chapter 4. You're likely familiar with this parable.

I think it'll serve us as we think about this text in James. Mark 4 beginning in verse 3 and following. Jesus tells a parable. He says, So we see in this parable, verses 3 through 8, we see four different types of soil.

And there's a sowing that's going on. And we're going to find out what all of these soils mean. The sowing is happening in these soils in the hearts of men. So the truth being taught and how that truth is received is what's being taught here in this parable.

[12:20] This is one of those wonderful, fortunate parables where Jesus goes on to tell us exactly what he means by the parable. So we don't have to guess at all. If you go on down to verse 14, he explains. He explains.

Verse 14, Mark chapter 4. The sower sows the word, the truth, the gospel. And these are the ones along the path where the word is sown.

When they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. It yields nothing. Nothing happens at all because it's taken snatched away. Verse 16.

And these are the ones sown on rocky ground. The ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. It seems to produce in them an emotional response to this truth of salvation.

Verse 17. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while. Then when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.

[13:26] So when their supposed salvation brings trouble to them, walking in the way of truth becomes difficult. They no longer weave on the way, they want to get off the way as fast as they can.

Verse 18. And others are ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word.

And it proves unfruitful. So they hear the word, they're receptive of the word. The parable, which we didn't read, but previously in the chapter said, he who has ears to hear, let him hear.

So they hear the word, but they love the world far too much. And it chokes out fruitfulness in their lives. Verse 20. But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit.

Thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold. So while Jesus here normalizes the wanderer, he does so for the benefit of the faithful.

[14:41] That we might understand what is happening to people that we love and why. That we might know what is going on in the hearts of these people.

This text in Mark 4 in no way trivializes the wandering or makes the wandering any less sad. Which is why James is exhorting those who are not wandering to go.

To go to the one who wanders with the intention of bringing them back. There are those who are good soil, right? Who will begin to wander.

And we go to them. And we say to them the word and they remember, oh yes. Oh, the good commands. Oh, the gospel. And they come back.

They show themselves to be the good soil. This is much of the life of the church. Trying to sort out. [15:42] Trying to assess by God's good instruction. Sowing the word and figuring out the soils. So that's the second observation. There is a wanderer. Somebody who has wandered from the truth.

The truth of their salvation. Third observation. God uses human means to accomplish divine purposes.

God uses human means to accomplish divine purposes. We see the very end of verse 19. Go to them. And this person brings the wanderer back.

Right? Brings them back. Let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death. And will cover a multitude of sins.

Now on the surface, this ought to get the hairs on the back of your neck rising. You ought to have a high view of the sovereignty of God. His powerful working in the lives of people.

[16:48] We ought to know. I can't change a person. Only God can change hearts. Right? Only God brings people into conformity with Christ.

And so there's a lot about this that ought to make you go, wait, what? How is it that me as a goer to bring somebody back brings them back? Helps them?

Brings back a sinner from wandering from the truth? Saves his soul from death? And to be clear here, we are not talking about temporal death. We're talking about eternal death.

Saving of his soul. We're saving a person from damnation. Can't only God do that? Cover a multitude of sins?

This expression in the Greek does not mean hide away the sins. This isn't like if you bring them back, they can avoid the embarrassment of their sins. This is a word used to forgive sins.

[17:42] Isn't this the saving work of Christ? Only by the precious blood of Christ that people's sins are forgiven. And the answer to all of that is yes. Yes. But God uses human means to accomplish divine purposes.

He uses Christians to help one another walk faithfully. So I think some helpful points to get us to think about this.

Some biblical truths that I'd like to show you to help you understand what it is that James is trying to communicate here. God uses human means to accomplish divine purposes. Number one, we are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

We're declared righteous before God, restored to him, justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

There's no way by your works that you can earn your salvation. And the scripture is abundantly clear on this. I'm going to give you one reference. It was part of our text from last week, Ephesians 2, verse 8 and 9.

[18:49] Right. For by grace, you have been saved through faith. And this referring to the faith is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast.

You cannot with your greatest effort, save yourself. You cannot by your greatest effort, save anybody else. Right. If the person is to be saved, they are to be saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

This is the gospel. This is the good news. We can't save ourselves, but God graciously saves.

That's number one. Number two, those who are justified, saved, declared righteous in Christ will persevere to be glorified.

Having been saved by God, they will be kept by God to the end, to be glorified, to put off our flesh and our sin forever. Romans chapter 8, verse 30.

And those whom he predestined, he also called. And those whom he called, he also justified. And those whom he justified, he also glorified.

[20:08] Now, if you're a guest this morning and you are not beating the same drum I'm beating when it comes to doctrines of salvation, that's okay. You don't have to be quite on the same page where I am and get all wrapped up into the word predestined in this text.

But the thing you cannot avoid in this text is to see that the people that God justifies, he glorifies. There's no wiggling out of that.

And I don't know why you'd want to. Those who are, in fact, saved cannot lose their salvation. It's an impossibility. God saved you.

God will keep you. If you show yourself not to be a Christian, right? If you apostatize, you walk away from the faith, all that is is evidence that you were never saved to begin with.

If you are truly saved, it's a work of God and it will remain a reality. Okay. So number one, we're justified by graceful and faithful and Christ alone.

[21:08] Number two, those who are justified will persevere to be glorified. Number three, no one will be glorified if they do not persevere in faith.

Evidence the fact that they are saved. Colossians chapter one, verse 21 and following. And you who once were alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds.

So this is status who you once were. Verse 22. He has now reconciled, right? Made right with God in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.

So there's two statuses here. There's a pre alienated, hostile in mind, doing evil deeds. Now reconciled, right? Made right with God by the death of Christ.

Then verse 23 says, if. If indeed you continue in the faith. Stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

[22:23] If. If. If. You don't. Wander ultimately away from the truth. It evidences.

That we're in Christ. So again, you cannot earn your salvation. The first thing I said. You cannot, if you're saved, lose your salvation.

The second thing stated. But you can prove that you were never saved to begin with. You can wander away from the truth. Ultimately and finally and never be brought back.

And I think this should make us all serious about our faith. That happens from time to time.

Vultures on the porch. Maybe they'll.

[23:24] Between that and the cardinal that smashes into the window. We've got. Like we're running a bird sanctuary here. Okay. Point number three. Let me get us back on track.

No one will be glorified if they do not persevere in faith. Right. This should make our Christianity serious. Right. We ought to be concerned. Work out your salvation.

Fear and trembling. For it's God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Fourth point. God is the one who sustains those who are saved.

God is the one who saves those who are saved. Very similar to point number two. Those who are justified will persevere to be glorified. But the point here being that God is working by grace in us to sustain us to the end.

Paul writes Philippians chapter one and verse six. I'm sure of this. That he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. Glorification at the day of Christ.

[24:25] Right. Many of you have young children who are just learning to walk or who have just learned to walk. When they're walking seems more treacherous than usual.

The ground is uneven or they're on the edge of a curb or they've learned that bouncing along a retaining wall is fun. We often say hold my hand.

Hold my hand. If our children know what's good for them they'll take our hand at that time. But if our children lose their footing and take a tumble. It is not because they are holding on to our hands that they don't go down hard.

Right. Their grips are not so strong. Right. But it is because we are holding on to their hand. They put their hand in ours and we hold their hand.

Don't offer your child your finger and expect them to grip it and not fall off the retaining wall. You hold their hand. And this is what keeps them safe. God is ultimately the one who sustains us to the end.

[25:35] Right. Our hands are merely resting in his. And fifth. And this is the main point that I'm making. God uses human means to accomplish divine purposes.

That sustaining work in our lives. He uses human means to do it. And it's not the only but a primary mean that he uses is the church.

Christians who are committed to one another to walk out the Christian life together. The author of Hebrews writes chapter 3 verse 13 and following. But exhort one another every day.

As long as it is called today. That none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness. Of sin. For we have come to share in Christ.

If indeed. We hold our original confidence firm. To the end. That there it is.

[26:33] Right. Encapsulated for us. God intends for us. To be together with other Christians. Who are going to encourage us. To warn us.

Right. To persevere. To the end. And beloved. God of this. Is the thing we call congregationalism. If you're a member of this church.

This is part of your work. To engage one another. This is not a consumer event. Right. Where you just come and get some information. Information is being shared.

But the church. Is to be doing this work together. Right. Not just showing up and voting on a budget. That's not what congregationalism is. Congregationalism is helping one another.

To faithfully follow. Jesus to the end. John Piper. If you happen to be unfamiliar with him. As a contemporary pastor. Once said. Eternal security.

[27:29] Is a community project. It is sure. For God's elect. But it is not without means. Therefore. We should take. One another. With ultimate.

Seriousness. Now. When people are wandering. In our fellowship. This is not. A thing that we typically. See happen. With severity.

Usually doesn't happen. Quickly. James uses the term. Wandering from here. Right. It's like a. Meandering off. The path of the truth. Right.

He doesn't say that they're running. They're not bolting. Or sprinting away. From the truth. But they've. Wandered. It's a. It's a drifting away. From that profession of faith. That they once.

Made. Which means. We have to be watchful. We have to be paying attention. To be careful. In our help. Of one another. Again. The author of Hebrews.

[28:25] Chapter 2. Verse 1. Said. Therefore. We must pay much. Closer attention. To what we have heard. Lest we. Drift away. From it.

Altogether possible. For ourselves. And for others. To drift. Imperceptively. Out of the safety. Of the cove.

And out into the storm. Of the sea. We want to be. Rescuing one another. From that. Drift. We want to be. Holding each other. In. The faith.

And we've been given. A process. By which we do this. It's outlined. In Matthew. Chapter. 18. This process. That we call. Church discipline. And most likely. When you hear this term. You think.

To the very end. Of that process. It's where my brain. Went. For a decade. Which is the.

Excommunicating. Of a person. Right. Declaring them. Not in the faith. But there's a whole process. Outlined. Before that.

[29:22] Which is also. Church discipline. Right. Discipling. Helping each other. Remain. Faithful. But here's what's. Phenomenal. About Matthew.

Chapter 18. Right. If your brain goes there. And you know it. We're going to read it. In just a moment. Right. But what comes right before that. What comes right before. What is Jesus saying. Right before that. In Matthew. Chapter 18.

This is the last half. Verse 12. And following. He says. If a man has a hundred sheep. And one of them. Has gone astray. Has wandered.

Away from the truth. Does he not leave the ninety-nine. On the mountains. And go in search of the one. That went astray. And if he finds it. Truly I say to you. He rejoices over it. More than over the ninety-nine.

That never went astray. So it is not the will of my father. Who is in heaven. That one of these little ones. Should perish. And then. Verse 15.

[30:17] It is right after that. That he says. If your brother sins against you. Go and tell him his fault. Between you and him alone. If he

listens to you. You have gained your brother.

Right. Why? Because he is good soil. Because maybe he was blind to his sin. Or. Is becoming self-deceived.

And was justifying. His sin. If he is good soil. He will come. Back. Jesus says in John 10. 27. My sheep hear my voice. And I know them.

And they follow me. And verse 16 says. But if he does not listen. Maybe he is particularly stubborn. Or particularly blind. Take one or two others along with you.

That every charge may be established. By the evidence. Of two or three. Witnesses. So. Gang up a little. In love. For this wandering.

[31:14] Brother. Verse 17 says. If he refuses to listen to them. So there is assumption here. That he may listen to them. And come back. And be restored. And you have gained your brother.

But if he refuses to listen to them. Tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen. Even to the church. The full witness of the church. Let him be to you. As a Gentile. And a tax collector. Let him be cut out. Of that fellowship. For his good. For the witness of the gospel. The high hope of his. Restoration. In Christ.

So this is the work. That we are meant to be doing. It is the means. That God intends. To rescue. This wanderer. This is divine purpose. To rescue. All who are in the faith.

And we are meant to go. After them. Right. As that. That. Solitary. Sheep. So here. In brief. Our applications. If you are taking notes.

[32:11] You got worried. Three observations. Five applications. You went. We are going to be here another hour. We are not. These will be fast applications. Okay. So first application. Love one another.

This will be difficult. This will be patient. Work. And church is not meant to be easy. And comfortable.

It will be difficult. Patient. Work. Right. To decide. To love. Somebody. Right. To seek their highest good. To do this.

We will have to be motivated. Right. By that highest good of others. To go after them. Right. To be patient. To have hard conversations. Right. This often happens at our expense.

First Corinthians. Thirteen. And verse six. Not just a text for weddings. Love. Does not rejoice. At wrongdoing. But rejoices with.

[33:09] The truth. Desires for people to walk in. The truth. Because it's for their good. And it's for the worship. Of our God. So love one another. Secondly.

Love one another. By. Knowing the truth. If we are to go after the one. Who has wandered from the truth. We will have to know. That they have wandered from. The truth.

And this may seem. Too obvious. But my concern here. Is that we. Do not call someone. A wanderer. Who is simply wandering. From. Our. Personal preferences.

Or our particular. Applications. Of a biblical truth. Right. They're not. Doing it exactly. The way we. Might. Do it. We need to recognize. That the Bible.

Contains some gray areas. And we need to be careful. That we are dealing. In the black and the whites. Of the Bible. As we seek out. That wanderer. Right. You need to be able to. Open up the text. And say.

[34:05] Brother. Sister. This. The Lord has spoken. Right. Thus saith the Lord. He has spoken. To this. Very. Issue. This is why.

I've been pressing. Upon you all. The idea of theological. Triage. Which I won't get into. At all. But I just want to insert. Another plug. For the theological. Triage. Right. We need to be able. To quickly assess. What things. Need to be addressed.

What things. Places in which. We can. Disagree. And still have. Unity. And call one another.

Brother. Or sister. Those who are in Christ.

Will heed. Loving. Wise counsel. And they will return. To the way. Of the truth. They'll stop.

Wandering. From. The truth.

On your bulletin. This morning. There's a quote by. Puritan. Nathaniel Vincent. He once said. He who despises. The word of God. And its commands. Is not. Sincerely converted.

[35:01] But damnably. Deluded. Deceived. Deceived. Third application. Love one another. By living. An exemplary life. We ought not be hypocritical.

In our correction. We are not perfect. Any one of us. Right. But we ought to be setting. An example. A wanderer is not fit. To help someone. Not wander. Right.

You can't yourself. Be wandering. And help a wanderer. None of you. Know the way. So you have to not be a wanderer. To help a wanderer. Right.

You need to be setting. An example. Of what it looks like. To faithfully. Follow Jesus. Even as we fail. To follow Jesus well. What does it look like. To return. To him.

For the grace found. At the cross. Paul wrote. First Corinthians. Eleven. Verse one. Be imitators of me. As I am. Of. Christ. Fourth application.

[35:57] Love one another. By being willing. To confront. One another. Right. So if you love somebody. If you're really. Going to love them. You're going to have to do this. In your life. Right. It is work.

Right. This is. Congregationalism. Right. If you're going to be a meaningful member. Of. A church. I hope this one. Many of you are already. And this is a work.

That you're going to be. About the work. Of. Paul writes in Ephesians. Chapter four. Beginning in verse 11. About the gifts. That Christ gave. To the church.

He gave apostles. Prophets. Evangelists. The shepherds. And teachers. For something. To. Equip the saints. For the work of ministry. For building up the body of Christ.

Until we all attain. To the unity of faith. And of knowledge of son of God. To mature manhood. To the measure of the stature. Of the fullness of Christ. So that we may no longer be children.

[36:51] Tossed to and fro. By the waves. And carried about. By every wind of doctrine. By human cunning. By craftiness. In deceitful. Schemes. Rather.

Speaking the truth in love. We are to grow up in every way. Into him. Who is the head. Into Christ. From whom the whole body. Joined and held together. By every joint. With which it is equipped. When each part. Is working. Properly. When you're doing. What you're supposed to be doing. As a member of. A church. Makes the body grow. So that it builds itself up. In love.

God has placed you. In the life of this fellowship. Or perhaps another. Right. That you might be a joint. Working in the process of. The divine purpose. Of sustaining.

Those who have been justified. To the end. Fifth and final. Application. Love one another. By restoring. The wanderer.

[37:48] Gently. Let's talk about confrontation. Some of you might have said. Ooh. I got permission. Let's go. Galatians chapter 6. In verse 1.

Paul says. Brothers. If anyone. Is caught. In any transgression. You who are spiritual. Should restore him. In a spirit. Of gentleness.

And then he says. Keep watch on yourself. Lest you too. Be tempted. And he's not explicit. About what the temptation. Would be there.

But I think. Contextually. It's likely. That the temptation. Would be to become. Proud. In the restoration. Right. That we would.

Forget. That we did not. Save ourselves. Right. We are not. Staining ourselves. We are. Being shown. Grace. Anything I do. That's ever obedient.

[38:41] Is a wonderful grace. Of God to me. Right. We ought not. Ever be proud. As we restore. A brother. Or a sister. So love one another. By restoring. The wanderer.

Gently. So. In the. Letter. That we call. The book of James. James. Warns his readers. Be careful. Not to wander. From the truth.

And. Go after. The wanderer. From the truth. And then it ends. That's it. He stops it. Right there. And I.

I really think. It's poignant. The way he stops it. I really think. He means for us to go. Right. There's a lot of places. A lot of ways. That I can go.

And do this. So I'm going to read. Those last two verses. And then I'll pray. My brothers. If anyone among you. Wanders from the truth. And someone brings him back. Let him know. That whoever brings back.

[39:37] A sinner from his wandering. Will save his soul from death. And will cover a multitude. Of sins. Let's pray together.