

# True Religion

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Preacher: Jeremy Martinson

[ 0 : 00 ]     Should we pray together? Father, what a great privilege to be here, to be in this place, to have this opportunity to lift our voices together and to sing to you of who you are, our great God of heaven.

To lift you up, Lord Jesus, our Redeemer, our Deliverer, our Victor, our victory. Thank you that you have promised to come and to take us to be with you. Thank you for crushing the gates of hell.

Thank you that we stand now in your victory and in your righteousness. Father, we come before your throne of grace, humbly and yet boldly confident, because we come here not in our own righteousness, not in our own doing, but in the righteousness of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Your word tells us there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ. And so we come, we gather, we worship, and now we turn our attention to the preaching of your word and we ask that you would help us.

Help us to listen. Help us to believe. Help us to obey. Help us to see Jesus. It is in his name we pray. Amen.

[ 1 : 30 ]     And Ryan is going to serve us this morning by reading our portion. James chapter 1. And we are looking for verse number 19. And then down through verse 27.

Verse 28. Thank you.

been wronged. Anybody been wronged? When you have been wronged, it is not wrong to want justice.

When you have been slandered, it is not wrong to want to tell the truth. When you have been laughed at or ridiculed or mocked, it is not wrong to want that to stop.

When you carry boatloads of shame, it is not wrong to want to tell your story. God, our God, is just. And to be just means that he always does what is right.

[ 4 : 01 ]     And because God made you in his image, when you have been wronged, it's not wrong.

And it's not surprising that your heart cries out for justice. Making wrong things right reflects our God, who is just.

But here's the danger. In our quest for justice, we are tempted to take matters into our own hands.

Pain causes our words to become more reckless, and our emotions more volatile, and our actions more violent.

And so we plot revenge. And we lash out in anger. We seize control, and we grab power, using force if necessary.

[ 5 : 12 ]     And we convince ourselves that the end of securing justice must justify the means.

But human anger does not produce God's justice.

And James calls us to a better way. To refuse the temptation to get justice by any means.

And instead, to commit to persevering in ordinary obedience to God's word.

In the first sermon in this series, we learned God's purpose in our suffering. Joyful endurance produces Christlikeness.

[ 6 : 13 ] And last week, we discovered a second purpose. Since we have been rebirthed by our Father of Lights, we are like firstfruits.

We are tangible evidence of God's ongoing redemptive work. And that means every trial is more than just personal pain that we are feeling.

Every trial is public testimony. And our friends, our neighbors, our family, our coworkers, they are watching to see how we will endure trial and adversity, persecution, suffering.

They're watching. And that means every trial is a mission field. Now, I need to confess something to you.

And I'm a little embarrassed to do so. But here we are. And I know I'm among friends. And I know you love me. I have thought of the book of James in this way.

[ 7 : 21 ] As sort of a grab bag of short teachings. Each teaching sort of encapsulated within itself. Each teaching really good on its own.

But not really connected to each other or forming a larger argument. This is like going to school and doing a whole bunch of math lessons without realizing that you are learning algebra.

I have studied James' lessons individually without recognizing that he is teaching us following Jesus 101.

Verses 19 through 27. These are not stand-alone lessons. This is the Holy Spirit's call to a radical way of life that James calls true religion.

And we will be helped in identifying this theme by remembering that for the very first hearers of this letter, the trials of various kinds that we saw back in verse number two seems to refer to socioeconomic persecution.

[ 8 : 41 ] Poverty caused by financial injustice. Class-based oppression. Social mistreatment for following Jesus.

Today's passage is connected to the one before it through the idea of community in verse number 18. God birthed us. And he made us, we together, are part of the first fruits.

We are evidence of God's ongoing work. A work that is not finished yet. It's not finished in you. It's not finished in me. It's certainly not finished in this broken world.

We are evidence of being the first fruits. Evidence of God's ongoing work of redemption. God birthed us.

And we are part of the first fruits. If you look at verse 19, it begins this way. Know this or understand this. NIV says, take note of this.

[ 9 : 50 ] I think the idea we're supposed to get is that they ought to remember, they ought to know that they were birthed by God. He's drawing us back to verse 18.

He doesn't want us to disconnect verse 19 from 18. Knowing this, you know that you are God's children. You know that you are his first fruits.

We might say it this way. This is how I think James might say it if he were here with us right now. Because this is how we would talk. Mindful of who you are, my dear brothers and sisters.

Mindful of who you are. Let every person be quick to hear. Slow to speak.

Slow to anger. For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

[ 10 : 52 ] Notice three brief commands. Quick to hear. Back in verse 14, James describes the sinful desire that is inside of us.

And that sinful desire is enticed by temptation. Apparently, some within the community to whom James is writing are being tempted to respond to this socioeconomic persecution with violence.

And this threatens both the testimony and the security of the whole group. And so James says, listen up.

Pay attention. Don't ignore this. Be quick to hear. And slow to speak. He doesn't mean talk slowly.

Like that coworker who has espresso shots before coming to work and then fills up his coffee cup throughout the morning. And by the time you're meeting with him, he is rolling.

[ 12 : 07 ] And there is no stopping that freight train. This is not what he's talking about. He doesn't mean talk slowly. James is concerned about reckless rhetoric.

He's concerned about verbal volatility. The kind of talk that fans flames of frustration.

The kind of talk that stirs up dissension. The kind of talk that divides communities and causes people to pull away from one another.

Be quick to hear. Slow to speak. And slow to anger. Now perhaps James has in mind here just angry speech.

But let's remember. Elsewhere, James mentions chapter 3. Bitter jealousy. And selfish ambition.

[ 13 : 15 ] And chapter 4. He talks about quarrels and fights within the community. Unmet desires that are leading to murder.

He even tells the rich in chapter 5. You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. What if James is still describing how the community ought to respond to trials of various kinds?

Then we should think about these commands in terms of the oppressed, helpless, poor. And the abusive, powerful, rich.

And in the context of that desperation. We're not surprised that some are tempted to or have already given in to anger.

Becoming both verbally abusive and even physically violent towards the rich and powerful. These three brief commands are crucially important because they set up this thought in verse 20.

[ 14 : 35 ] Human anger does not produce the righteousness of God. In other words. Any kind of resentment.

Any kind of anger or wrath or malice. That leads to violence. Will not result in God's justice.

The kind of society that God has in mind for his people cannot be produced by force.

The kingdom of God will not be established by violence. Volatility is not a missional strategy.

I don't think that this should be controversial. But it is. The way of Jesus is the way of the cross.

[ 15 : 50 ] Not the sword. Therefore. Verse 21. Put away. All filthiness.

And rampant wickedness. And receive with meekness the implanted word. Which is able to save your souls.

Because your anger won't result in his will being done. Because your anger won't bring about God's kingdom. Because your anger won't produce God's kind of justice.

Therefore. Therefore. Put away. Purge. Get rid of all that sinful desire. That leads to filthiness and wickedness. Get rid of it.

And instead. Instead. Receive the word. Receive the word. Be hospitable. We might say.

[ 16 : 54 ] To the word. Like telling a house guest. Like telling a house guest. If you're hungry. Just help yourself to the refrigerator.

Go make yourself at home. In the pantry. If you need something. Take what you need. Please. Let the word.

Have its way. In your heart. Why? Because the word. Is able.

To save your souls. Do you see that? And in context here. We get a parallel. The righteousness. That will not be achieved.

Through volatility and violence. Is paralleled in the saving of our souls. God's righteousness.

[ 17 : 50 ] The kind of society. That he has in mind. For his people. His kingdom. Is paralleled in the words. Save your souls. Don't be violently angry.

Because you won't get God's justice that way. If you want the kind of society. That God has in mind. For his people. Be quick. To listen.

To the word. And as Ryan taught us. In our first Sunday. Of this year. We need to read. Do.

Do you remember that one? Chapter 1. Verse 22. But. But. Notice. Notice. We can't just receive the word.

We can't just take the word into our. Into our hearts. Like. Like being hospitable to it. Something needs to result from that. But. Be doers of the word.

[ 18 : 53 ] And not hearers only. Deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word. And not a doer.

He is like a man. Who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself. And then he goes away. And at once. Forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law.

The law of liberty. And perseveres. Being no hearer who forgets.

But a doer who acts. He will be blessed. In his doing. Notice how this section.

Connects to the one before it. Those who look into the word. But don't act. Those who listen to the word.

[ 19 : 52 ] But don't obey. Forgetful hearers. They parallel. Those who are angry and violent. But they are making a big mistake.

They are deceiving themselves. Their anger. Will not result in God's justice. But in contrast.

Those who hear. And do. Those who look into the perfect law. The law of liberty. God's law.

As interpreted and obeyed by Jesus. Those who look into the mirror of the word. And they persevere. In being quick to hear. Slow to speak.

Slow to anger. They will be blessed. In their doing. Again. By parallel. Those who are blessed in their doing. Are those who will receive.

[ 20 : 54 ] God's justice. Being quick to hear.

Slow to speak. And slow to anger. This is the fertile soil. That sprouts. What James calls. True.

- Religion. Look at verse 26. If anyone thinks. He is religious.  
And does not bridle his tongue. But deceives. His heart. This person.  
This person's religion. Is worthless. Religion that is pure. And undefiled before God.
- [ 21 : 56 ] The father. Is this. To visit orphans. And widows. In their affliction. And to keep oneself.  
Unstained. From the world. To the person. Who considers himself.  
Religious. But runs at the mouth. Rather than being slow to speak. To the person. Who considers herself.  
Religious. But is a hothead. About hot button topics. Rather than being slow. To anger. To the person.  
Who regularly shows up. For worship gatherings. But is tempted. By the allure. Of seizing power. Getting justice. Right now. And by any means.
- [ 22 : 53 ] At all. James repeats. His warning. From verse 22. You are. Self. Self. Deceived. And your so-called.  
Religion. That's worthless. It may be. Some kind of. Cultural. Christianity. But it is not. True. Religion. Religion. Purges. True religion.  
Purges. Impulsive language. True religion. Refuses the temptation. To indulge your desires. With angry words.  
True religion. Keeps your mouth. Under control. True religion. Means. Having compassion. and serving the impoverished, the marginalized, the oppressed, those who are so often overlooked and ignored by those in power.
- [ 24 : 03 ] True religion means godliness, thinking and responding and talking and acting like Jesus, rejecting your natural desire to get justice or to establish peace or to bring about God's will through human anger or violence.  
True religion means following Jesus' example. It means enduring sorrows while being treated unfairly.  
It means being reviled without reviling in return, suffering without threatening. We remember that while enduring infinite injustice, Jesus did not fight back.  
Jesus did not demand his rights. Even when others were wrong about him and he suffered for it, Jesus continued entrusting himself to the Father.  
The Father who judges justly, who always does what is right, who will bring about justice in his time and in his way.
- [ 25 : 31 ] Jesus himself bore our sins in his body on the tree. Why? So that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.  
It is by his wounds that we are healed. Have you been healed by the wounds of Jesus?  
True religion means joyfully enduring trials so that you become more like Jesus.  
True religion seeks God's wisdom in trials. It asks, what is God doing right now? What is God doing in me? What is God doing through me?  
What is God doing around me? What is he doing in spite of me? True religion remembers that one day the lowly really will be exalted and those who seem to have all of the power and selfishly enjoy so much one day will be utterly powerless.
- [ 26 : 52 ] True religion means rejecting the temptation to get justice right now through anger and violence.  
It means pursuing justice instead in meekness, refusing to use power to exploit the weak. True religion receives the word and lets the spirit make himself at home in your heart.

True religion is a hearer and a doer. One who is quick to listen. One who persists in obedience.

True religion is shaped by the gospel in the context of the community of first fruits. James is not a collection of disconnected, standalone teachings.

James is following Jesus 101. This is an exhortation about how to be faithful to God while enduring suffering and injustice.

[ 28 : 08 ] This is a compelling, radical way of life that James calls pure and undefiled religion.

True religion. And it is my privilege to learn this way alongside of you. True faith is tested faith.

And steadfastness through suffering results in the delightful gift of becoming wiser with Jesus. And this wisdom, it shapes us.

It shapes us in humble holiness, gentle reasonableness, merciful goodness. Every word we speak, every choice we make, every trial we endure is an opportunity to make our faith visible, to testify about the Father's goodness, to offer hope and healing through the word of truth, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, my dear brothers and sisters, let's keep our mouths under control and be slow to anger that leads to volatility and violence.

[ 29 : 28 ] Let's care for those who suffer, especially those who are weak and marginalized. Let's show hospitality to the word, gladly welcoming it into our hearts as we work, as we worship, as we watch, and as we wait for Jesus to bring justice and peace.

By God's grace, let's be doers of the word and not hearers only. Let's pray. Father, for your kindness and for your grace, we give you thanks.

And for the clarity of your word, we give you thanks.

For the gift of your Son and for sending your Spirit, for birthing us to new life, making us part of your family, giving us the privilege of testifying about your ongoing redeeming work in this world.

Lord, we give you thanks. Father, as our attention has been turned to Jesus, would you please grant repentance and faith?

[ 30 : 58 ] Would you please heal someone hearing this particular sermon? Heal them as they put their attention on Jesus and they understand him as the one who suffered without threatening, who endured injustice without fighting back, who took all of the wrongs that could ever be done in himself.

Father, would you please grant life and faith and repentance so that those who hear and are in need of a Savior repent and believe this gospel.

Father, as we reflect on our own hearts, we recognize that there is very likely some misalignment with our hearts and your Word, and in particular, this portion that we've looked at together.

Would you please, by the power of the Holy Spirit, also grant us repentance? Help us to be quick to listen to your Word.

Make us hearers who do. Help us to be hospitable to the Word. Father, would you please realign our priorities with yours?

[ 32 : 28 ] Would you please settle in our hearts this simple truth that seems so controversial that our anger will not produce your justice?

We long for the day when Jesus returns to set all things right, to give us the justice that in this world we recognize we may never have, to bring the peace that this world desperately longs for, but cannot find as they refuse to look to the God of all comfort.

Father, please help us. Grant us repentance. Forgive us for our sin and remind us again and again of the blood of our Savior Jesus, the one who has borne our sin in his body on the tree.

Lord Jesus, we are so grateful to be your people. Please make us more like you for our good, for your testimony in this world and for your ultimate glory.

It is in your name, the name of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, that we pray. Amen.