

WHERE DO YOU STAND WITH YOUR FAITH #8
“Faith Based On Truth”
Psalm 52:1-9, John 3:16-21, James 4:1-6
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Jon Mutchler of Ferndale, Washington, tells this account for us to consider. He says, “While I was a seminary student at Regent College I had an assignment to attend and report on churches in various worship traditions outside my own. One evening I attended mass in a nearby and unfamiliar town. After leaving St. Joseph's Catholic Church, I pulled out of a side street onto what *looked* like a county road. I managed to reach 40 miles per hour before being pulled over and ticketed for going 15 miles per hour over the city limit.

“Since I was new to the town and because of my chosen route, I had not seen the 25 miles per hour speed limit sign. Therefore I decided to plead my case before a judge. The court date came and I had my arguments and justification all worked out. I had rehearsed my little speech over and over in my head. Finally, the court clerk read out my name with the charges. The judge, dressed in a black robe - representing his designated authority and power - said, ‘Mr. Mutchler, do you have anything you wish to say?’

“Here it was, my chance to speak! Surely the judge would understand and side with me. But to my surprise, it hit me at that moment that I was, in fact, guilty, and my excuses would do nothing to change that. All I could say to his question was ‘No, sir.’

“That moment brought to life what Scriptures say to those who think they're going to argue their case before God.”¹ When our turn comes to stand before the Almighty God in defense of all that we have done, and He asks, “Do you have anything you wish to say?” what will be our response? What can the guilty say? Representing ourselves before God will result in only one verdict - “Guilty!”

You see, **despite what we think about ourselves, we are all sinners in desperate need of God's grace.** We may seek to do good, or we may purposely seek to do what is wrong in the eyes of

¹ (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg. 125-126)

God, but we all fall short of the glory of God by the things we say and do. Even our best efforts fail us and we are left standing before God, guilty of sin, with nothing to stand upon but our lame excuses.

You see **we live in a world that more and more stands against the Judeo-Christian God, the Lord God Almighty, the King of the universe.** The world does not recognize the laws and commandments of the Lord, and many are blatantly thumbing their noses at anything connected with the Bible. They boast of their evil. They promote lawlessness and corruption. They reject any form of righteousness except their own. They malign those who strive to follow God's commandments. And they even want to change the very basics of human life. They do evil and are proclaimed by many as being good and just, yet in reality they are bringing destruction to their own countries. Their faith is in their own wisdom, and their hope is in the stock market or in their own business dealings. They trust in the things of this world and their foundation of life is established on their bank accounts.

Psalm 52 tells a lot about the people living according to the ways of the world. These are people who delight in doing wrong, bringing hurt and harm to those they despise or those they want for their own pleasures. They plot out evil and destruction of their enemies, and they bring it about by telling lies and spewing out harmful words against those who stand against them.

This psalm of David gives a judgment upon these people. *“Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin; He will snatch you up and pluck you from your tent; He will uproot you from the land of the living”* (Ps. 52:5). That's a pretty harsh judgment, but lest we begin to take joy in seeing “those evil people” suffer such a verdict, **we need to remember that we all can find ourselves in similar situations. Most of us at one time in our lives were like them, trusting in our great wealth and growing stronger by destroying others (Ps. 52:7).** Though the ones David is referring to are on the greater scale of disobedience to the Lord's commands, we can easily find ourselves, even now, being in the same boat as they are in their judgement.

We must admit that we live in a “dog-eat-dog” world where often the only way to succeed in business is to outdo the competition, often doing our best to make them look bad and us good. If you

see any of the commercials for the mid-term elections coming up, you'll see the kind of thing David is talking about. The mindset is "Give the opponent the worst report you can think about, true or not, just to make yourself look better as a candidate for public office." But we are each guilty of the same kind of wrong, only on a lesser scale. We talk about others and do our best to make ourselves look good because we make the others look bad. We are just as guilty of breaking God's Law and commandments. Its human nature, and we all stand in judgment for the same sins.

But David gives us hope, so that we might not become completely discouraged. He says, "*I trust in God's unfailing love forever and ever. For what You (God) have done I will always praise You in the presence of Your faithful people. And I will hope in Your Name, for Your Name is good*" (Ps. 52:8-9). David recognized that our only hope for real life and for forgiveness is in the Lord God Almighty, and as we follow His Laws and commands, we find His mercy. When we put our hope and trust in the Lord our God, we find the avenue that leads to life, rather than eternal death. We find blessing instead of ruin.

Jesus lifted up this same condition to Nicodemus in John 3. He had come to Jesus at night seeking the truth of Jesus being the Messiah. Right after the best known verse in the Bible, John 3:16, which gives us the avenue of our hope beyond this world, Jesus explains the situation of humanity to Nicodemus. Jesus tells him plainly, "*Whoever believes in (the Son of God) is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's One and Only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light...*" (Jn. 3:18-21).

Our human nature calls us to reject God's Laws and commands and to live in the darkness of the world's ways. We all love the darkness rather than the Light of Jesus, for if we stand in the Light of Jesus, all of our deeds will be exposed and we will be found guilty of sin against God's commands. **Yet, we, who are guilty, adamantly stand before God trying to defend our wrong in order to receive**

His forgiveness and grace. He is God, we rationalize, so He has to love us. Well, God does love us, so much so that He sent His own Son, Jesus, to save us from our sins as we turn to Him for help. However, we cannot gain God's forgiveness on our own. No, the only real hope we have for mercy and grace is God's plan of Salvation through Jesus Christ, so *“that whoever believes in in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”*

It doesn't take us too long in reading the Bible that we can see the need for all of us to make the decision to trust in Jesus for eternal life. **Throughout the Bible we are reminded how easily it is for us to turn away from God and end up in horrible situations.** Much of the history of the people of Israel in the Old Testament shows us the difference it makes to trust the Lord for His guidance, following all of His laws and commands. When we do that (follow God's commands), God blesses us as His people. When we rebel and go our own way, God removes His hand of protection and blessing, only to have the nations falter and fail. Yet we are so slow to learn that there is no other way to find God's grace outside of God's provision. For us today, that hope is only in Jesus.

Yet many today do their best to work it out on their own. They may join a church, work at a variety of mission outreaches, pray, read the Bible, and live a good life, but none of that is enough to earn our way into eternal life. James Colaianni states it this way. He says, “The first thing God wants of us, the first thing we must do to be right with reality is to live in faith (in Jesus Christ). We cannot be right with God merely by keeping the letter of the law; we cannot be right with God simply by disciplining ourselves; we cannot be right with God just by being as good as the next person. We can be right with God only by faith (in Jesus). Which is to say that we must live in the constant conviction that God is good (and that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life). Genuine faith involves an all-out attitude of reliance of God's goodness (given to us in His Salvation).

“It may be compared to a child's absolute trust in a wise, generous, loving father or mother. There is a world of difference in attitude, not to mention output, between a son who does things for his father out of love and respect, and that of an employee who does things merely for pay, or out of fear

that he may lose his job or not get a promotion. They may do the same things, but the difference in motivation inevitably colors their work.

“There is a world of difference between a doctor who chose his profession because it made him an instrument of vital human service, and one who calculatingly chose the profession because it promised a large income! So it is with Christian faith: what counts is motivation, spirit. Commitment to religious law and formal observance cannot substitute for the conviction that God is good (through His Son, Jesus). That is where faith’s reality begins.”²

Eternal life is not found in working it out on our own, but by trusting in Jesus Christ as our Savior. When we believe in Him, we receive forgiveness of our sins and a brand new start at life as we seek to follow His commands. **There is no other hope outside of Jesus for eternal life.**

“But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God” (John 3:21). Those who believe in Jesus live in His Light so that all they do and say will be seen by all those around them, demonstrating that they are a follower of Jesus, and they do so for the glory of God. No one can save us outside of Jesus Christ.

And our lesson from James 4:1-6 concurs with this. Listen to how James lays it out. (READ James 4:1-6)

When we have our focus on the things of this world, we become selfish and we have little to no regard for others. When we neglect God’s call to love others and treat them with respect and care, we look out only for our own personal interests, and go after them with all our hearts. So we fight and quarrel because our desires for worldly things battle against God’s call to be generous and gracious. And as our focus on the worldly things gets the better of us, we seek them with all our hearts, thereby going after them as strong and as hard as we can. So we find that *“(we) desire but do not have, so (we) kill”* (4:2) in order to get what our desires drive us to get. *“(We covet but (we) cannot get what (we) want, so (we) quarrel and fight”* until we get what we want. *“(We) do not have because (we) do not ask*

² (James F. Colaianni, *Sunday Sermons Treasury of Illustrations*, [Pleasantville, NJ: Voicings Publications, 1982] pg. 159)

God. (And) when (we) ask, (we) do not receive, because (we) ask with wrong motives, that (we) may spend what (we) get on (our) pleasures” (2:2-3). This is the nature of the person who defiantly rejects God’s will and ways and strives to get what they want, when they want it, as fast as they can get it, for as long as they can get it, from whomever they can get it. It is selfish, an infantile craving that looks out only for the self with no regard for anyone else. There is no concern for another, except to get what the one wants. If the other one has what the one wants, the one will do whatever is necessary to satisfy that desire, even if it is to the hurt of the other. **If we choose the world, our case is lost and we face death.**

This is not God’s desire for us! God desires that we love each other, care for the other, respect the other and even sacrifice ourselves for the other. God’s desire for us is that we look at the other as being more important than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). **As we have faith in Jesus Christ, we model our lives after His example and become living sacrifices for the sake of others.** As we submit ourselves to God, we no longer look only to our own desires, but look at how we can meet the needs of those around us.

So James adequately questions each one of us, saying, “*You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God*” (4:4). He is telling us that when we turn to the things of this world, rather than continue in our faith with the Lord God Almighty through Jesus Christ, our love has become adulterous, such that we break the vows we make to trust and follow only the Lord. When we turn from our faith in the Lord Jesus, and seek the things of this world, we violate our statement of believing that He is our all in all. **When we become a friend of the world, we turn our backs upon the Lord Jesus and violate our loyalty to Him.**

This is spiritual unfaithfulness to the Lord Jesus, hence why James calls those who turn to the things of the world “*adulterous people.*” We are called to be the “bride of Christ” (Ephesians 5:23-32), being faithful to Him as a wife is to be faithful to her husband. If we as members of the Church, but seek after the things of this world to join with it in receiving all we want from it, are we not committing

spiritual adultery against the Lord Jesus? For we cannot serve two masters, the world and the Lord. We must choose one or the other.

In James, “The world is referred to as the system of evil controlled by Satan. It includes all that is wicked and opposed to God on this earth. Therefore, friendship to this world is opposed to all that is of God, and seeks pleasure only from the wickedness of what Satan provides. To have a warm, familiar attitude toward this evil world is to be on good terms with God’s enemy. It is to adopt the world’s set of values and want what the world wants instead of choosing according to divine standards. The person who deliberately “*chooses to be a friend of the world*” by that choice “*becomes an enemy of God.*”³

God has condemned all the things and ways of Satan, so when we become a friend of the world, we acclimate ourselves in the ways of Satan and become a part of the condemnation that he receives.

James is then pleading with the church of Jesus Christ to open their eyes to the truth of this danger so that we do not fall prey to Satan’s deceptive leadings. If we claim to be followers of Jesus, yet conform to the ways of the world, we prove ourselves to be apostate - traitors to the love of God, and renegades against the Son of God, Jesus, who came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10).

So James is imploring us to return to the ways of the Lord, to give up the delights of this world and to let our faith be founded on the basis of the truth in the Lord Jesus alone. The world stands condemned already because of its rejection of Jesus as the Christ, God’s Savior. He continually reaches out His hand to each one of us, inviting us to take His hand and to be saved from the eternal death that this world is destined for.

We who call ourselves Christians, followers of Jesus, have promised our love and devotion to the Lord God Almighty, but when we choose to be a friend of the world, we show that we have now fallen in love with the world rather than with the Lord. **God loves His children, so He jealously longs for us to once more put our love and trust in Him rather than the things of the world.** He does not want our destruction, which is where the things of this world are headed, but He wants our Salvation. So God

³ (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Frank Gaeblein, editor, [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981] Vol. 12, pg. 193)

sends us His Spirit to entice us back into the ways of God rather than in the ways of the world. The ways of the world lead to death, but the ways of the Lord lead to life. God desires that we choose eternal life over any pleasure that the world might offer to us.

Since God loves us so much, He does not want us to end up with destruction as our eternal destiny, but desires that we find His blessing of eternal life instead. Therefore God extends His grace (4:6) to us so that we might resist the charms of this world and remain loyal to His will and His ways, which provides much more than what the world could ever offer.

James concludes this section of Scripture with the Old Testament plea to submit to the Lord. Proverbs 3:31-34 states to us, *“Do not envy the violent or choose any of their ways. For the Lord detests the perverse but takes the upright into His confidence. The Lord’s curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous. He mocks proud mockers but shows favor to the humble and oppressed.”* In using these verses as a backdrop, James pleads for us to submit to the Lord our God through Jesus Christ. **It is the humble who freely relinquish their own desires to claim the ways of the Lord for their life instead.** They humble themselves to the will of God rather than to arrogantly demand on satisfying their own cravings of pleasure.

Friends, the choice is ours as to whom we will follow. Will it be the things of the Lord which lead us to righteousness and everlasting life? Or will it be the things of the world which lead us to selfishly seeking pleasures for ourselves resulting in eternal death. It cannot be both, for you must choose one or the other. You must choose to be loyal to the Lord God in Jesus, or to be faithful to the things of this world. I invite you to choose life found only in Jesus Christ our Lord. Let’s pray.

Father, faith in Jesus Christ is really the only hope we have for life. His truth brings life to all who will believe and follow. Give us the heart for Your will and Your way. Give us the courage to stand against the siren call of the world for us to forsake our loyalty to You and turn to it instead. Let our faith be based upon the truth of Jesus being the Way, the Truth and the Life for all of us who believe. Let Your Holy Spirit fill us with such desire to serve and follow Jesus, that we want nothing more than to be with Him. Lead us, Jesus, so that we may follow You wherever You go and wherever You send. Let us be Your disciples. This we pray in Your precious and holy Name. Amen