

Bible Study Guide

PASTORATE

September 12, 2012

Lectionary Readings: Isaiah 35:4–7a; Psalm 146; **James 1:17–27**; Mark 7:31–37

Background on James and His Epistle

- James was one of the four “brothers” of Jesus (Mark 6:3); he came to faith after the resurrection and was the primary leader of the early church in Jerusalem.
- James likely wrote this letter from Jerusalem in the 50s to various churches and synagogues of messianic Jews scattered throughout the Mediterranean world.
- Many of James’ themes relate to Jesus’ teachings: undergoing trials; being generous toward those in need; being a doer of the word, not just a hearer; mercy; peace; the love commands; not judging; attitude toward “the rich.”
- The contents of James’ letter are arranged in a topic-to-topic fashion.
- James addresses Christian communities that are oppressed by persons in power, and so throughout much of his letter he challenges them not to retaliate in kind, but to respond with the love of Christ.

Read James 1:17–27

Study Notes on the Passage

- **1:18** *a kind of firstfruits* – the beginning of God’s new creation (cf. Rom 8:23); a renewed community in the world marked by a lifestyle of love, joy, peace, etc.
- The three topics of 1:19–27 are fleshed out elsewhere in James.
 - Speech behavior (3:1–4:12)
 - Hearing and doing (2:14–26)
 - Pure religion (2:1–13)
- The social conditions described in 1:19–21 are expanded on in 3:13–4:12, indicating that these oppressed communities were tempted to retaliate with physical violence and verbal abuse.
- **1:20** *God’s righteousness* – or “God’s justice”; things are not made right through anger and retaliation
- **1:21** *accept* – the translation could be stronger: “welcome” or “surrender to”; one who “accepts the word” is a “doer of the word” (1:22)

- **1:21** *the word planted in you* – for James, the “implanted word” is the “word of truth” (1:18), the “saving word” (1:21), “the perfect law of liberty” (1:25), and the “royal law” (2:8); it is the message of and about Jesus.
- **1:22–25** the contrast between listening and doing is emphasized by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7:21–23)
- **1:25** *the perfect law* – the Torah as understood and reinterpreted by Jesus (as in the Sermon on the Mount)
- **1:26–27** summary statement of the whole chapter

Discussion Questions

1. What questions did this passage raise in your mind?
2. Which part of this passage convicts you the most? Why?
3. Which part of this passage inspires you the most? Why?
4. What part of this passage is difficult to understand?
5. In what ways do you struggle with your tongue?
6. In what ways can an individual or church community today put into practice the calling to care for orphans and widows?
7. What did you learn about God from this passage?
8. Regardless of where your faith is at right now, if you were to apply what we learned about God to something in your life this week, what would that be?

Read Psalm 146

The Collect of the Day

Grant us, O Lord, to trust in you with all our hearts; for, as you always resist the proud who confide in their own strength, so you never forsake those who make their boast of your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.