

**Final Exams**

(James 5:12-20)

1/27/15; Wed PM Pine Grove

**Introduction**

In order to avoid getting all the blondes mad at me, I have changed this joke from a blonde joke to a Whitmire joke.....

A boy from Whitmire sits down for his first test at college...

It is a chemistry test of 100 true false questions.

He sits down to take the test and begins to panic.

So, he comes up with a plan.

He pulls a quarter out of his pocket and begins to flip it...

When a heads comes up, he answers TRUE to a question and when a tails comes up, he answers FALSE...

He flips the coin a hundred times and finished the test before all of the other students....

Suddenly, with a few minutes to spare before the test is due, the professor notices the boy from

Whitmire in the back of the class furiously flipping a coin...

He makes his way to the back of the class to see what's going on and the boy tells him of his method of flipping the coin to answer all the questions...

The professor but then asks him why he all of sudden starting flipping the coin real fast with just a few minutes left to spare...

The boy from Whitmire tells him....

“Well, Mama always said if I finished a test early, I needed to go back and check my answers...”

Tonight, we get to the end of our tests in James...

And though there are just 9 verses remaining in the book, there are 3 tests of true faith in those 9 verses...

I have chosen to look at these 3 tests in one night rather than drag you through each of them on separate nights...

Two of the tests will be fairly easy and simple to understand but the third test will take up most of our time tonight to look at...

Now remember, God inspired James to write this book to the church to help people examine their claim of faith...

James could be entitled Faith Under the Microscope...

Because James wrote with the purpose of helping his readers to understand if they were truly saved or not.

And for the past two months, we have been looking at these tests of true faith...

Every week, we have been putting our claim of faith under the microscope of God's Word to see if it is real or not...

Now, let me add a word in here...

So many people based their claim of salvation on how they feel...

That is not an accurate test of true faith because I assure that some people who are truly saved don't always feel saved...

And it is also true that some people who are clear unbelievers may in fact feel saved at times..

Your feelings are not an accurate gauge of the genuine of your faith by themselves...

The Bible never tells someone to see if they “feel saved” in order to see if their faith is real..

And the reason for that is this...

Feelings are like the wind...they change direction at times...

Therefore, you need more to go on that your feelings, and that is why the Lord was gracious enough to inspire men like James and John to give us tests of our salvation..

Tests that allow us to measure our faith to see if it is real...

We have seen 10 of these tests in the book of James, and all of them are tests that a person can take to see if their faith is real...

Everyone needs a way to confirm the realness of their faith at times...

You shouldn't have to wonder if you are saved...

You shouldn't have to ask yourself, do I feel saved?

And so God has provided the tests of faith in James and in other sections of Scripture to see if you are in fact truly saved...

Here are the 10 that we have looked at so far...

James 1:1-12 - True faith sees spiritual value in trials.

James 1:13-18 - True faith knows that temptation comes from within and resists it because of God's goodness.

James 1:19-27 - True faith receives God's Word with humility and obeys it with actions.

James 2:1-13 - True faith does not show favoritism to others based on outward appearances.

James 2:14-26 - True faith backs up its claim of salvation with good works that follow.

James 3:1-12 - True faith is revealed by a person's words and speech.

James 3:13-18 - True faith lives by the wisdom of Scripture and not the wisdom of the world.

James 4:1-12 - True faith wins the the war against the old nature consistently.

James 4:13-17 - True faith plans for the future knowing that God change change your plans if He wills.

James 5:1-11 True faith patiently endures the injustice in the world and the injustice that comes to them.

So there are 10 tests of true faith.

Now, let's add 3 more to that list tonight....

So, let's begin with test #11 in James 5:12 tonight...

This is just one verse, but it is one test of true salvation...

This is....

## **I. A Test of Truthfulness (12)**

Let's just read verse 12....

***12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but [j]your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.***

The simple test of faith here is a test of truthfulness...

Is the pattern of your life to tell the truth when asked?

True believers are known for being truth tellers...

And James is simply reminding his readers of the danger of making oaths...

If this passage teaching sounds familiar, it should.

Jesus taught the same thing in Matt 5...

***33 "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.' 34 But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is the foot-***

***stool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil.***

Now, what does swearing an oath have to do with telling the truth?

Quite simply, people who are known as trustworthy don't have to swear oaths by God or by heaven..

It is assumed that whatever they say is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth...

When someone asks you if you ate the last cookie in the cookie jar, a simple yes or no is enough if your words can be trusted...

You don't have to go into some outlandish...

"I swear I didn't eat that last one..."

Or even worse... "I swear to God I didn't eat that last one."

For a person who is trustworthy, a simple yes or no is enough because you are sure that they are someone who speaks the truth...



Jews were known as oath makers because they were known liars...

But in order to make an acceptable oath, they would swear on all sorts of things...

By heaven, by Jerusalem, by their own life...

However, they would very rarely invoke the name of God in their oaths...

In the days of Jesus and James, making oaths was very common among the early Jewish believers because they had grown up in a culture that commonly made oaths and vows...

Jesus and James were just simply saying that vowing isn't a good witness...

The best witness is simply being a person who tells the truth.

Listen to what one person said about this verse....

“In a society that is known for deception, court systems have to have oaths because the people are known for their lies. The more widespread the lies, the more widespread the use of oaths to encourage truth telling.. The person of true saving faith should have a reputation of telling the truth....And never having to resort to making a vow to convince others

that he is telling the truth...It should be his or her way of life to tell the truth..”

Let me sum up verse 12 for you....

People of true saving faith are known for telling the truth..

Now the question always comes up...

Should you never make an oath or take a vow or swear a promise?

And the short answer is this....

It is fine to take an oath or a vow, that isn't a sin..

But it is a sin to take an oath as a way to cover up your lying..

IF you have to be a witness at a trial, it is okay to swear to tell the truth and then to tell it..

The sin is not in the oath, it is in the lying.

God made vows in the Bible; people in the Bible made vows to God...

The vow is not the problem; the violation of the vow is the problem..

Test #11 is this...

Are you known as a truth teller or a lie teller?

People of true faith tell the true facts.

So, let's move from test 11 to test 12...

This is the longest section of this final exam in James...

I have entitled it a...

## **II. A Test of Trust (13-18)**

Let's read verses 13-18 to introduce test #12...

***13 Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.***

***14 Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, [k]anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15 and the prayer [l]offered in faith will [m]restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, [n]they will be forgiven him. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective [o]prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed [p]earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. 18 Then he prayed again, and the [q]sky [r]poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.***

To sum this test up in a few words...

People of true faith are people of prayer...

They trust that God is real...

They trust that He hears their prayers..

And they trust that He answers our prayers according to His will...

How do we know that prayer is the point of these verses?

Well, James uses the word pray in every verse...

Verse 13...Let him pray...

Verse 14...Let them pray over him

Verse 15...the prayer of faith

Verse 16...pray for one another...

Verse 17...he prayed fervently

Verse 18...he prayed again..

The test of true saving faith is found in a prayer life that trusts in the Lord...

And prayer is really that...

Prayer is admitting God is big and you are small while also admitting He is in control and you are not..

Prayer is an expression of trust and faith...

No prayer life = No faith....

Great prayer life = Great faith...

Now, let's look at these verses real quickly...

In verse 13, James covers every possible aspect of life....

Are you suffering and sad? Then pray to God.

Are you happy and cheerful? Then sing praise to God.

This verse stands in contrast verse 12 where our tongue gets us in trouble making oaths and promises...

In verse 13, James is telling us that our tongue should be making prayers or songs...

Now, does this mean that a person suffering shouldn't sing but only pray...

And that a happy person shouldn't pray but just sing..

And I wouldn't say that at all...

Sometimes, the best thing to do is sing in the valley and pray on the mountaintop that God will keep you out of the valley.

The point that James is making is that prayers or praise should always be on the tips of our tongue whatever life deals us..

But then he focuses on the one who is suffering in-verses 14-15....

***14 Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, [k]anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15 and the prayer [l]offered in faith will [m]restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, [n]they will be forgiven him.***

Unfortunately, these verses often steal the spotlight from this passage...

People are divided on what it means to have the elders pray over you and the role of oil in this prayer..

And whether or not this is a promise of healing if the elders and oil are involved in this prayer...

I won't spend much time here...

But I'll give you my two cents and feel free to disagree or ask me any questions later about this verse..

The point of these verses is that prayer helps those who are suffering...

But let's think about this...

Is this a promise of healing if the elders pray over a person and use oil?

No, it is not...

If that were the case, the stores would be out of oil and every church would be full of elders...

James is simply saying a sick person can turn to others for help in their sickness..

He or she can invite over the elders of the church to pray for them...

And the point of that is this...

Prayer is an acknowledgment that you trust the Lord...

And that you love the saints of the Lord and want them to pray with you in your suffering...



Sometimes your faith is weak and you need to rely on the faith of others...

The elders of the church would be the spiritually strong..

In times when you spiritually or physically weak, you should be able to call on the physically strong to get you through your suffering...

Now, what's the deal with the oil...

Now remember, the point of the passage is that the Lord heals through the prayers of the elders and the one who is suffering..

The oil is not the focus of the passage...

My view is that the oil is simply representative of a medicinal help in James day....

They are 15 CVS on every corner in Jerusalem when James wrote this letter...

There are doctors but not anything like we think of today...

Oil was simply a repellent to infections and diseases by creating an extra layer of skin...

You would bathe and then cover your self in oil...

And by the way, the word used for anointing here means to literally cover a person's body with it..

This isn't a dip in the oil and a dot on the head kind of anointing...

The word speaks of smearing oil all over the body..

And I believe the teaching is for the elders to come to people who are sick and pray over them and give them medicine in the form of oil...

That is why you don't show a lack of faith when you are sick by taking your medicine...

So people say that; some pastors preach that you need to flush all your medicine and simply have faith in God to heal you...

I would say that James 5:14 teaches just the opposite....

Pray but take your medicine...

It doesn't show a lack of faith to go to the doctor or to take medicine when you are sick...

It may be what God uses with your prayers and the prayers of others to heal you...

And again, this isn't a promise of healing because people have had elders pray over them and have taken their medication or been anointed with oil...

And still weren't healed...

But regardless of the physical outcome of the elders prayer, there is great spiritual benefit in going to the Lord in prayer with others...

Even if your never physically recover...

And beyond that, prayer with others is a great testimony of true faith...

And James says that in verse 16...

It is good for the church to be praying for one another and with one another....

It is also good for a church to be confessing sins to one another...

That speaks of accountability to each other and a desire to put off sin...

And a word of caution here as well...

This isn't a command to get up and confess sins before the whole church...

Some churches seem to read too much into this verse..

Church wide confession may be necessary in some cases of church wide awareness of the sin...

But more often than not, church wide confession causes more harm than good...

A good rule of thumb is to confess only to those who have been affected by the sin....

James says to confess sins to one another not to every one, and much wisdom needs to be exercised in what is shared...

In most instances, having a person to keep you to account and to call when you do fall into sin is the best solution to confession of sins....

The point of confession is not to air dirty laundry.

Rather, it is designed to keep the air clean between you and the Lord and between those affected by your sin...

Along with confession of sins, James also reminds us that we need to pray with one another as well...

And he ends with a wonderful promise....

***The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.***

How God uses our prayers to accomplish His will is a great mystery of the faith...

We just simply know that prayer is something that He does use and according to this verse, He does a lot through the prayers of the saints...

James then closes this section by pointing to a righteous man named Elijah...

Many of you may know the OT account of Elijah praying and the rains stopping in Israel for 3.5 years...

He then prayed again and God sent rain on the land...

Though that certainly points to the power of prayer, I want us all to notice how James describes Elijah in these verses...

Look at the beginning of verse 17....

***Elijah was a man with a nature like ours....***

What an encouragement...

We think of the prophets of the OT as supermen, but the fact is that they were ordinary people like us...

If their prayers were answered in mighty ways, why do we doubt the power of prayer today...

People of true faith are people who trust in the lord and express that trust in their prayers both for themselves and for others...

Nobody ever prays enough...

And every generation of the church could have prayed more...

But I don't know of any generation of the church that is made up of Christians who pray less than our generation in the church in America....

I blame it on our temptation to be self-reliant....

And I blame it on our prosperity as a nation...

But most of all I blame it on the busyness of life that keeps us off our knees and on our phones...

If the power of prayer is as deep as the deepest parts of the ocean, many of us never get in deeper than our toes in the surf at the beach...

I want to be a better prayer; I just hope the Lord doesn't send a helpless situation to get my attention on my prayer life...

One more test to go in our final exam and this is found in verses 19-20...

I have called this test a....

### **III. A Test of Turning (19-20)**

Let me read the verse and we will talk about it....

***19 My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, 20 let him know that [s]he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.***

If there is one truth about the church that we fail to understand or maybe we refuse to acknowledge, it is this truth....

Not everyone among us is saved...

The Bible is clear...

The wheat is sown among the tares even in the church...

The sheep live among the wolves even in the church...

Those aren't my words; those are the words of the Lord of the church, -the Lord Jesus Christ..

But those are hard words to handle and harder words to believe...



Because sometimes those words apply to dear friends and even dear family that go to church with us...

People who sing in choirs beside us and go to Sunday school with us and shake our hands and hugs our necks at times in the church...

Yet, those words are just as true as they are heavy.

Now, James wrote this letter to help his readers sort out their faith...

To see if it was real or not...

And the reader of the letter were people in the church, but we know that not all of them were saved...

Many of them failed every test of the letter most likely...

And they had 3 choices....

Leave the church, deceive themselves into thinking that they were saved, or truly believe in Christ and get saved...

That was a choice that only they could make and often times, that was a choice that only that person knew about...

So, what reaction should we have to people who are self-deceived?

Well, we can't really help them.

They have to admit their lostness before they can be helped...

What reaction should we have when people realize they aren't saved, but then they repent and truly believe?

Well, we rejoice with them and love on them and welcome them into the church with open arms as people who now have a genuine faith...

But what about the last group?

What about the people who realize after taking these tests that they aren't truly saved and being to wander off from the flock?

Well, James tells us what we are to do in that case...

We are to go after them and try to turn them back to the truth...

WE are to pursue them and show them the error of walking away and call them to true salvation...

This is a test of turning people back to the Lord...

And people who possess true faith have genuine concern about people who were once in the church but have since left for whatever reason...

Now, let's clear up any confusion that may come from these verses...

***#1 - You cannot lose your salvation...***

The ones who are truly saved will continue to the very end...

The Bible teaches that principle in various places...

And we don't have time to look at all those verses, but let's be clear that James is not talking about someone who is saved and then loses it...

No, the instruction here is toward someone who made a confession of faith but shows by their actions that their words were empty...

Eventually, they do what every person who isn't truly saved does...

They wander away from the truth and from the church and from the fellowship with other believers...

In that case, go to that person with the truth of the gospel...

And treat them like an unbeliever....

***#2 - Only God can truly turn them back to Him...***

Be persistent in your pursuit of them but realize that unless God changes their heart, they will remain in their sin and stayed unsaved...

The burden is not on you to convince them to come back...

God can only do that...

The burden is on you to call on them and share the truth with them...

Whether they turn back or not is not your responsibility.

You are simply called to be faithful to go to them..

***#3 - Sometimes, prayer is your only weapon in this fight.***

There comes a time in situations like this where going to them has to end...

And that is fine...

But there is never a time when your prayers for that person should end.

The point of these final verses is that people of true faith should have a desire to see those unbelievers who were in the church but walked away come back..

People of true faith should do what they can to turn others back to the Lord...

And when the Lord does you to turn others back to Him, look at the results of true salvation in verse 20...

A soul is saved from death...

And a multitude of sins are forgiven...

That is the beauty of the gospel...

## **Conclusion**

Well, that concludes the final exam of this book...

James has put and his readers to the test, and God through James has shown that true faith always shows up in the deeds that follow our profession of faith..

No one who claims to be saved can prove their claim apart from their works...

If your faith is real, the works that follow the claim will be real to anyone who looks...

And if they are genuine, then the claim of faith isn't genuine either...

Let us pray.