

## James 1:18-27 - Hear, Do, Serve...all in Love

Introduction.

Bibles. Hand them out. Don't own one, take it. Gift.

We'll be in the book of James today. James chapter one. This is a continuation from the last time we were in James where we covered the first 18 verses. Now we'll be continuing through the next set of verses, starting in verse 18 and running through verse 27. So we'll be rounding out chapter one today. James can be found near the back of your Bibles, just before Revelation and the epistles of John and Peter. We're starting in chapter 1, and we're reading verses eighteen through twenty seven. We'll read it, pray, do some review from last time, and get into it.

<Text>

***18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.***

***Know this, my beloved brothers: 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. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.***

***22 But be doers of the word, 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 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.***

***If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.***

Pray.

## <Old Background>

### Instructional and Wisdom Oriented

I've always taken these verses to be very instructional, very wisdom oriented. And they are definitely that for sure. But the key theme that the Lord revealed to me these last weeks as I studied and meditated on this text is the theme of love. And, if you've read these verses before you may be thinking, what? Love? Sounds like a bit of a reach. But when you see this in terms of what our Savior did for us, and how this propels us to 'Do' what James is saying, you begin to notice the love wrapped up in these verses. So I'm pretty excited to share with you what the Lord revealed to me, and I'm hopeful He will share a good word with each of you this morning.

So we covered quite a few things last time when we went through James 1. In the interest of time, we'll do a quick flyover of some of that content to help provide some clarity to today's text. It's been a few months since we've cracked open the book of James together so let's do some light review.

So the first thing we did last time was we performed some background work on who exactly James the Just was. We said this would help us understand the credibility he brought to the topics of obedience, serving, suffering, and all the other tough topics in his epistle.

We said that James was Jesus' brother. James did not follow Jesus during his earthly ministry nor was he at the cross for Jesus' death. But Jesus still reveals himself to James after the resurrection, which led to James' conversion from Judaism to Christianity. From there James became the leader of the Jerusalem church. And even with all of this esteem and clout and lengthy resume, he starts off his epistle taking the lowest title: servant, or said another way, slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. As we consider Christian obedience and Christian service, we see James, at the outset, submitting to Jesus as Lord, putting out of focus any blood relationship to Jesus. James shows us at the very beginning, "I am a on a journey much like you. I am Fallen. Sinful. In need of a Savior." All good things for us to remember as we read through this book.

The final piece of background on James had to do with his nicknames. He was called James the Just because of his utmost integrity, his virtue. The guy was honest, he was faithful in following religious customs and the law, and he prayed. But he didn't *just* pray. He prayed the way that Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians 5. To pray without ceasing. James fell to his knees so often in prayer that he earned a lesser known nickname of old camel knees. His knees were so calloused from prayer, from praying for the saints of God, that his knees were like those of a camel. I know many of us don't have our camels stabled outside this church, but safe it to say, a camel's knees are generally pretty beat up!

The story of James' martyrdom is proof of both his integrity and his prayer life. According to an early Christian scribe that recorded James' death, we learn that the Pharisees came to James

for help in putting down Christian beliefs, specifically that Jesus was the Christ. The Pharisees asked James to say, loud and proud, on the roof of the temple, that Jesus is not the Christ. As you can imagine, when James made it to the summit of the temple, he did quite the opposite. He boldly testified that "Christ himself sitteth in heaven, at the right hand of the Great Power, and shall come on the clouds of heaven". The Pharisees threw James from the roof of the temple. But the fall didn't kill James, so the Pharisees began to stone him. And as James was breathing his last, he was recorded as being on his knees, praying: "I beseech thee, Lord God our Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

We've all heard the adage, "Keep the faith." Well, James was the kind of dude that kept the faith, even unto death. Even as he was realizing his own death, he was on his knees praying for those who persecuted him. Incredible integrity, incredible prayer life.

So as we dive into James' letter, we should all be okay with the things that James has to share with us, because he's been there! He's been through the intense trials, he had his faith tested, he sacrificially served the people of God, and, ultimately, his epistle points us back to the Holy and Perfect One, Jesus.

And so we see James jump right into it with verses two through four where he says **we will suffer and we will face trials**. And these trials, which God causes and allows, are for our good, and for the glory of God. When he says to let steadfastness have its full effect, he is not saying that the suffering or trial will **never** go away, though that may be the case. Instead, he's saying that the way you pray and turn to God when you are totally bankrupt and realize that you're unable to do anything yourself, **that** feeling of actually needing God, let **that** feeling have its full effect in your heart, in your soul. Don't miss this! This is the idea of letting steadfastness have its full effect. To realize the presence of the Holy Spirit at work in our earthly lives to bring us closer to the Divine. To the Almighty. To the Great I am.

He goes on in verses five through eleven explaining that **God counsels us in our affliction**. When we are going through this trial, through this suffering, James reminds us that God bids us to come to him. And for what purpose? Well, James says to ask for wisdom. God wants to give us the wisdom to remove the fog that's clouding our judgement. Our thoughts. Sometimes, even our prayers. And so James says to ask for wisdom in these things, and God will give generously.

Finally, we walked through verses twelve through eighteen where we said **God comforts us in the trial**. We said that when suffering happens, temptation occurs by the forces that God allows. But these afflictions are **NOT** intended to cause us to sin, but rather grow us closer to God. It's intended to grow our dependence on God through prayer, waiting, action, solitude, silence, meditation, and all of the Christian Disciplines we know about. God brought on the trial, it's up to us, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to respond in a holy way, not a sinful way. God sees us through these fiery trials and isn't simply waiting for us at the end or at the finish line. Instead, he picks us up when we fall, he gives us hope in the hopelessness. Friends, God comforts us in

all of us afflictions. He bids you to come to him to find joy, to find wisdom, and to find comfort. And from there, he wants to send us out to be a testimony of his character. Our heavenly Father will only bring good gifts into our lives, even if they are in the form of trials, so that His light can shine through us.

These are the things we covered last time. I flew through them pretty quick. If you want to read the sermon in more detail it's on the Mercy Hill website under the Resources tab and you can peruse it as your leisure.

<New Background>

So let's connect some of these points to our text this morning, and get into some new stuff. I've broken down our text into three main headings:

First, love by hearing, and that can be found in verses 19 through 21.

Second, love by doing, and we'll explore that in verses 22 through 25.

And finally, love by serving, and you can read those in verses 26 and 27.

And we'll round things out by concluding with verse 18, loved by Christ. Let's dive in.

Point one: love by hearing.

Verses 19 through 21:

***19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.***

This whole section is a continuation from the previous teaching on trials and afflictions. Specifically, James is telling us that we should aim to restrain the wrong passions that are stirred up in us when the trial comes. The wrong passion he is focusing in on is anger. We are to have restraint in our anger. But we can only have this kind of restraint with the power of God's word. Think about it: when our spirit becomes angry and it is provoked by trials and afflictions, we generally say and do some profane things that are out of character for us. Think that one through. Think through the last time something didn't go as you planned or expected. Like, really didn't go as you planned. Not just running late for work or overspending a few bucks at the grocery store. No, think about something significant. Like waking up for the tenth time in the middle of the night to tend to your needy child when all you want is just a few hours, only a few hours of sleep to yourself. I know a few of us here today can maybe relate to that. Or how about something a bit more substantial. Maybe a deeply rooted lie that we believe about our spouse, or a really good friend. And the instant we get one whiff of that ugliness rearing it's hideous head, we respond. And it's usually in a pitiful, regretful way.

There's any number of things that cause us to give in to temptations when we're faced with these trials, and whatever those temptations are we normally end up looking back at ourselves, if we're honest with ourselves, we look back at ourselves and confess & repent for the ugliness that came out. Perhaps even a spouse, family member or friend who witnessed the carnage of our speech will look at us and say something like, "Wow! You were in rare form." Or, "I've never seen you like that." There's grace for this, yes, that's for sure, and God is longsuffering with his children. This we know. But friends all of this that we just said, the trial, the giving in to sinful temptation, the confession and repentance, this is one reason why James 1:19 is here in our bibles.

It's here to teach us that the renewing grace of God and the word of the Gospel can help us to subdue these wrong feelings. Now you may be asking if God can work with our raw, wrong feelings? And the answer is yes! Absolutely! We see all throughout scripture men and women saying and doing the wrong thing, and God is there, right there(!), to comfort, to embrace, to love, and most importantly, to forgive. But can those raw, wrong feelings lead us astray from the truth of the word? Absolutely. So we must be cautious friends. With the temptations spoken in the beginning of the chapter, James is now telling us to hear God instead of trying to silence Him under our trials.

So how does James 1:19 apply to our time with God during our trials? Well, we should be quick to hear God: open our ears and hearts to hear what he will say to us. Be slow to speak: stop trying to have the first and last word with God; just be still. Be slow to anger: don't immediately believe that God is out to get you and pipe off the first sarcastic remark to Him. Believe the best in our God, the God of mercy, the God of love, the God of salvation, even as the trial is tearing you apart.

And we'll notice that the way we approach that whole vertical relationship with God our Father will inevitably be the way our horizontal relationships are shaped and nurtured. Do you see how that shift happens? Our relationship with God is THE indicator for how we treat our relationships with the Saints of God. And, if there were ever a people that we should emphasize James 1:19 with, it's with the people of God. Not to ignore one another, not to speak over one another, not to grow angry with one another. The world offers enough of all those things! We should take the full counsel of God here when engaging with our brothers and sisters at Mercy Hill, or any other Christian brother or sister. Think of the love that it conveys to the other person we are talking to when we are quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.

Church it is in love that God wants us to embrace James 1:19. It has a ton of wisdom rooted in it, this is certainly true. And it draws from many Proverbs that James likely knew well. Here's a few of them that may be familiar to some of you.

Prov 10:19 says When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.

Proverbs 15:1 says A soft answer turns away wrath, but a hard word stirs up anger.

Prov 18:13 If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.

Over and over again, we see in these wisdom books of the Old Testament, and across the rest of the Bible even, that providing guidance on the topic of speaking and hearing is paramount. And all the more should we heed this advice when engaging with the people of God. So we should ask the question, why? Why spend so much time on this topic of hearing, speaking and anger? Well, it has to do with verse 19b. Look there with me.

***for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.***

It's as if James is saying, "Look. Your deep seated passion and anger is not needed on God's behalf. God's cause is better served by mildness and meekness instead of wrath and fury." Friends there is no good, absolutely no good that comes from human wrath, especially in terms of pursuing God, or showcasing God's character. When has our self-reliant anger changed the human heart? Think about that. If it is God who saves, God who transforms the heart, God who awakens, God who speaks life, then why do we believe that our yelling, or rough and tough

anger will change the heart of our kids? Or our spouses? Or our friends? Or even the person on the highway that just cut us off? <Personal commentary on aggressive driving>

If our desire is to get to the heart, which it always should be, we should be asking God to help control our anger, not pushing him out of the way in wrath and expecting Godly results.

In Ecclesiastes 9:17 Solomon writes that **“The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.”**

Think about that verse in terms of our Savior. Although we can count one, maybe two times that scripture calls out when Jesus was angry throughout his earthly ministry, his anger always had the proper motivation (no selfishness), the proper focus (targeted true injustice), the proper duration (never turned into bitterness), and the proper control (his emotions were always in check). Jesus’ words were wise, and his ministry wasn’t known for being loud, flamboyant, or attention seeking. Now, let’s think about our anger. When we boil it down, our anger is quite the opposite from Jesus: it **is** selfish, it is likely targeting our **personal** injustice, it **has** turned us bitter, and our emotions are usually **not** in check. It’s quite the opposite of showcasing love to the person in front of us. But when we circle back to James 1:19: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, we see where that love is rooted. It’s rooted in the approach we take when talking with another person, and whether we are waiting for our next opportunity to speak, or waiting to hear everything this person has to say.

James goes on in verse 21:

***Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.***

The word filthiness here is meant to describe those lusts which have the greatest depravity and sensuality. I don’t think I have to provide many examples here, so I’ll leave that as is. And the words rampant wickedness may be understood as the overflowings of malice or any other spiritual wickedness; we’ve all seen or read about evil, whether it’s from our Bibles, our history books, fiction movies, the news with horrific things like human trafficking or genocide, or even personal experiences. Well, we’re told to put away this filthiness, put away this wickedness. “Put away” sounds like a mild suggestion against such extreme sins, doesn’t it? Like, put away the laundry, the dishes, oh! And put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness. No! The term put away here is a stripping off of dirty clothes because you want nothing to do with the dirt ever again! It’s saying to cast these behaviors aside, forever! It is not enough to control these behaviors, they must be cast from us. And not just the outward sins, but also the inward ones. The ones that people generally don’t see. Our thoughts, our affections. We should be asking those people in our homegroups to help us with mortifying these sins.

There’s a lot more I could say about these particular verses, but I want to focus in on the last part of verse 21 as this will shape the last two points for us:

**receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.**

James wants to tie verses 16-18 to verse 21: God gives every good and perfect gift, he is unchanging. And the gift that he gives is the Word of truth - which is described as good, perfect. And he does this so we could be a firstfruits of his creatures. He designed this Word for us, man, woman, child. Not for other parts of his creation - no! It's for us! God delights in his people, who we are, what we are.

And now verse 21 says that this word didn't come and go. It was implanted. It took root. It is in us and is part of us. We are born again by the word. And the word stays. Verse 21 says that this implanted word "is able to save your souls." The emphasis here is on the power and the importance of the word of God.

It is treated here the very same way that the Bible treats the Spirit of God himself. We were dead. We had no place for the word of God in us. We did not desire it or love it. Before we are born again, our hearts are full of other things that push out the word of God. It's like those people who spoil their appetite between meals and when the main course arrives we reject it. In fact, our stomach turns at the thought of eating. This is how unregenerate people feel about the real meaning of God's word. They feel no need for it, they're repulsed by it, and they reject it. So it has no place. It's not implanted in them.

But we, we are born again by the Spirit, and we are born again by the word of God. The Spirit dwells in us, and the word is implanted in us. This indwelling Spirit is God's way to keep us and bring us to heaven. The implanted word is God's way of preserving and saving our souls in the end. Friends, don't misunderstand the power and importance of the word of God.

The Apostle Paul talks about this implanted, saving word. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, he says,

"When you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, **which is at work in you believers.**"

The word of God did not come and go. It did not leave these believers. It is "at work in you."

So the word of God is "implanted" in us, and "is at work" in us, and James 1:21 says "saves" us. We cannot easily overstate how profoundly powerful and important the word of God is for our lives. The word of God should rank with our most cherished possessions. Mercy Hill **nothing apart from God himself is more important and powerful than his word.**

And as if this wasn't amazing enough, there's more. Verse 21 says (right in the middle of the verse), "**Receive** with meekness the implanted word."



The word is already in you. And you should receive it. It is rooted and planted in you. It brought you life. It is there sustaining that life by feeding faith in Christ.

It is at work in us, as Paul says. And the work it does in us is makes us want to receive it. And then James adds at the end of verse 21 “which is able to save your souls.” What saves our souls? The implanted word, which we receive.

Now just a word about meekness and we’ll move on to point number 2. In this context of hearing the word of God, meekness means something like “teachability” or “readiness to submit” to God’s word.

So when we open our Bibles and are going to receive the word with meekness, we should say to God: I trust you, I submit to you, I need you to help me. Incline my heart to love your word. Open my eyes to see the greatness of what is really there. Satisfy my soul with the glory of Christ revealed in all of this book. I yield to the supreme truth and value of this book. In all meekness and lowliness, I look to you. I desire to hear you.

Every day with meekness receive the word of God. That is, everyday be in the Bible. Breathe the Bible. Don’t try to hold your breath until Sunday when someone is up here reading you the word of God. Breathe it every day.

Point two: Love by doing.

As is typical, these last two points will go much faster. So if you're looking at your watch, don't worry. You'll be home before sundown.

Starting in verse 22 we read what is to be done after hearing: **22 *But be doers of the word, 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 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.***

If any of us looked in a mirror and saw a burly piece of broccoli between our teeth, we would likely pick it out. Right? Similarly, we would think that hearing or reading the perfect Word would propel us to find application in our lives. Back to the broccoli: can you imagine looking in the mirror, seeing that broccoli, and leaving it there? I don't know, maybe you're far more comfortable in your own skin than me, because that just sounds ridiculous. Anyway, to hear a sermon, or read a chapter in your Bible, and not to put into practice the things we are taught, James says that this is equally ridiculous. A mirror reflects back to us spots and dirt on our faces so that we can wash them off. Like a mirror, the word of God reflects back to us our sins, that we may confess and repent of them, and seek to mortify those sins.

Friends we could be the most attentive listeners of the word of God, but it will do us no good unless we are also doers. James insists that we practice what we hear. There must be inward practice by meditation, and outward practice in true obedience.

I'm going to keep this section pretty simple for us. So here's the practical thing to consider: do one thing. Every time you read your Bible, every time you hear a sermon, commit to doing one thing. That sounds legalistic, I know, but listen. I've been down the road before when I simply read my Bible and simply hear a sermon, and do nothing. I've sat under the word. I've felt my own sinfulness, my own misery. I've acknowledged the evil of my sin, and my need for Christ. I've been convicted. But, when the reading and hearing is over, everything is forgotten. My convictions are lost. All those good and wholesome things that God brought into my heart vanish like a vapor. And I would hope I'm not in the minority with this. Now, where we should prefer to be is on the other end of the pendulum where we are doing, and praying that God would bless our doing, rather than sitting idle and pray that he would bless our not doing.

Simply filling our heads with theology and information is not sufficient. Our hearts need to pursue the good works of God. However, we should not do for the sake of doing. Rather the image of Christ found in us should propel us to show the hands and feet of Jesus to others.

<Talk about Chris Keener>I enjoyed hearing Chris' sermon a few weeks back where he talked about all the different ministries he's been a part of over time. He didn't see walls as a sign to stop sharing the Gospel. It just meant to pursue a different ministry, and pray that God would meet him.

Church, let us be doers of the word. Do one thing. And pray that our doing be done in love. That's my challenge to you.

Point three: Love by serving.

So we first said that we can express love in our hearing. Then we said we can express love in our doing. Finally, we can express love in our serving.

***26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. 27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.***

You may see this word religious and think about those people who say, "I would classify myself as spiritual not religious." As a new Believer I used to be one of those people. Like I was somehow better than those who were seeking the Lord and figuring out their faith. Thinking, "Oh, you'll come around to the correct understanding of Christianity one day, like I have. Until then, go be your religious self." Look, I know, this is incredibly immature, but as I reflected on this story while putting this sermon together, I can see how the Holy Spirit continues to work in my life by not being as legalistic. Don't get me wrong, I have a long road left, but at least I can move past this whole religious and spiritual hardline. But specifically, here in this context, "Religious" Means "Faith in Jesus." So, reading this in context,

**If anyone thinks he has faith in Jesus and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.**

James says that people who think they have faith in Jesus, but use their tongues the way the world does, that religion, that faith, is worthless. And his point is this: If you say you have faith but you don't bridle, or said another way, control an unloving, lying, gossiping, cursing, angry tongue, then your faith is worthless. Harsh, right? I mean, we know that faith in Christ alone saves us, yes that is true! But whether our faith - our religion - is real is shown by the change it brings about in our hearts and lives, in particular our speech. There's a text that may help add some additional clarity to this extreme statement of faith being worthless. Let's look at Matthew 7:17-20. This is Jesus speaking :

**So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.**

Jesus is specifically talking about false prophets here, and he is telling us to beware, or remain vigilant and on guard. We should use a discerning spirit as we engage with people around us, especially if their speech could have a tendency to lead us astray. Similar to what James is saying that we will be able to tell more about a person's faith by their speech, Jesus is also saying that we will be able to tell more about a person's faith by the fruit they bear or don't bear.

It doesn't mean that we are here to judge, but rather, as James talks about in verses 5 through 8 of this chapter, we should pray. We should pray for wisdom of how to care for this brother or sister, how we should move towards them or, sometimes, away from them. Friends, we should also, and most especially, ask the Lord how we should pray for our own heart so our faith and our speech remains undefiled. So that our faith in Jesus is never perceived as worthless, by us or anyone around us.

Jesus says this also says this about our speech in Luke 6:45:

**The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.**

Jesus is saying that it's almost as if the overflow of our truest, rawest emotions are those that are regurgitated up from our heart, up our throat, and through this sinful vessel we call the tongue. We hope to control it, but many times the words we are saying are simply a reflection of the posture of our hearts. I've heard it said that the unspoken prayer requests from those people around us are often buried and disguised in the normal, day to day conversations we have with them. Does that person seem to find joy or pain in their experiences? Is that person open to sharing or does it seem like there's a wall up, protecting the sacred corners of their heart? Does that person see God in the day to day, or only in the magnificent? Or maybe not at all? These are the things we can listen for, and pray for as we engage in life with one another.

James then goes on in verse 27 to say that,

***Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.***

Look at the two kinds of effects that pure religion or faith in Christ has: 1) practical compassion toward orphans and widows, and 2) personal purity of life. This is important to see, because so many Christians will lean one way or the other. Some will go all in by saying: What matters is personal purity - sexual purity, financial integrity, a clean thought life, and so on; but they are weak in practical deeds of compassion for the poor and helpless. But some go all in on the other side, by saying: What matters is social justice and compassion and helping people, and what you do with your mind and body and your private personal life is not significant.

But James says, in verse 27, that pure and undefiled religion - true faith in Jesus Christ the Lord, is "to visit orphans and widows in their distress, **and** to keep oneself unstained by the world." Not either/or, but both/and. Social justice and the pursuit of holiness. Public compassion and private purity. We won't have time to go into the purity piece today, but don't you worry because James does indeed revisit this theme in a later chapter. Lucky us, right?

So let's break down the social justice side: first, why call out orphans and widows? That seems like an odd people group to single out. As we chip away at these two groups of people, we

notice that God wants us to be concerned about orphans because they are helpless without mother and father, and we should feel compassion for the helpless who depend utterly on others for life. Picture a three-year-old child riding in his car seat in the back seat of a car with his mommy and daddy riding in the front. There is a terrible crash and both mommy and daddy are killed. The child has minor injuries, but is okay. The hospital officials check and discover there are no grandparents and no other family members known. This is a heartbreaking situation. And God says to the church, step in there and take care of that child.

So orphans are children whose parents have died and left them at the mercy of others to take care of, lest they die.

Helpless children are a great concern to Christ and he says that our religion, our faith in him, will express this concern with radical, risk-taking acts of compassion.

Next, widows. The pain of widowhood is great. The loss of a husband or wife in death is heartbreaking beyond words. But the loss of a spouse through abandonment is in some ways worse. The amputations caused by death usually heal clean. The amputations caused by abandonment often stay infected. It does not heal the same.

May God grant us to speak both languages of compassion: the language of the orphan and the language of the widow. The language of the helpless child and the language of the desperate man or woman. Whatever we do, let us not be silent. For if we are, our religion is empty, and our faith is dead.

<Closing>

So let's bring all these truths, and all this wisdom, to the throne of grace. How does all of this measure up to what our Savior has done?

Well, for starters, over and over again we see Jesus being the one who is quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger. One example is in John 4 where he was not in a rush to initiate dialogue with the woman at the well, knowing it would take time for her to share her heart. And in the same way, he's not in a rush with us. The author of Hebrews exhorts us to draw near to the throne of grace with confidence, "that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." The Lord actively enters into our personal situation and understands our unique frame of reference. There are no distractions when we come to Him. He is totally immersed in what we have to share. Jesus is the one who, in love, fully knows us and yet fully loves us. He is the Savior of our souls, and loves to hear from us.

What about in doing? Well, we see Jesus do the greatest thing we could ever ask for. He did the thing we could never do. Live the perfect life we could never live. Die the death we could never die. He did this in love.

1John 3:16 says

**By this we know love, that he (Jesus) laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.**

You see that? Christ did the ultimate thing that the word instructed him to do: he laid down his life for us. For you. For me. And why? So that we can demonstrate the same selfless life for our brothers and sisters. That we would follow a Phillipians 2:3 model, where we would count others more significant than ourselves. That's our call in doing. It's been said before, that our time on this earth is so short. So short. What will you do with those extra hours as God preaches to your soul through his word and his people. Will you do one thing?

Finally, serving. We lightly just touched on the idea of serving widows and orphans. Mercy Hill, may we never forget, for those of us that call ourselves children of God, may we never forget that we were once spiritual widows and orphans. We were dead at the bottom of the ocean. No life in us. No breath coming out of us. Destined for an eternity in hell. Then God, being rich in mercy, spoke life into our lifeless bodies. And not only that, but he took it one step further.

Romans 8:12 says it beautifully.

**So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness**

**with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.**

We are brought into the family of God. We are called sons, daughters of the most high God. What an honor. Jesus served countless orphans, countless widows. But specifically, he served you and me. All the more should we seek out the orphans and widows around us to share the good news of our Savior.

So why have James 1:18 in today's sermon? To close with as an exhortation.

**18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.**

Church, God brought you forth: called you by name. By his own will: you were handpicked. By his word: the only thing as supreme as God himself. To be a firstfruits of his creation: to be born again. To experience life everlasting. To be his portion and his treasure. To be part of his family. Adopted into the heavenly places, with our names written in the book of life. Christ is the first-fruits of Christians, Christians are the first-fruits of creatures.

If you are of Christ and here listening to this today, praise God. I would exhort you to take these words to heart, and consider how God is calling you to do the things you are reading in his word, hearing preached on Sundays, being discussed in your homegroups. And if you're not in a homegroup, get in one! It's where life happens with the Saints, and where we go to know other people and be known.

If you are not of Christ, we want to thank you for joining us this morning. We are truly honored that God brought you here. We would say to consider whether you feel God is calling your name. Regardless, we have so many people here that would be honored to pray with you, hear and share stories, and just journey together with you.

Mercy Hill my prayer for us is this: That we may receive the word of God in meekness. That it becomes more pleasant to us than honey. Lord, open our hearts for this. Let's pray.