

# Beauty from Ashes

Week 1 - Love Rightly  
James 1:12-18

## Production Notes:

- Green on the Screen

## Welcome:

- Those watching online.
- New guests.
- The family.
- ReAlign nights.

## Prayer

- That God would still your minds and ignite your hearts.
- That God would make our hearts teachable.
- That Jesus would become even more beautiful.
- Pray that I would honor God with the delivery of His word.

## The Series: (Big picture)

We are in the season of Lent. What is Lent?

Lent is the period of 40 days before Easter during which many Christians do not eat certain foods or do certain pleasurable activities as a way of remembering the suffering of Jesus Christ and what is truly important. Christians also use this time to remember it was from ashes we were made and to ashes we will return. (Webster, 2018)

What do we want out of this series?

- I want you to grow in awareness of what really has your heart.
- I want you to grow in your love for what is eternally most important.
- I want this all to happen in such a powerful way that it's actually measurable.

## Opening For this Week:

Take out your notes. We will make two lists.

1. Write out the biggest purchases you have made in the last few years.
2. Write out what consumes your head space. What do you tend to think about a lot?

Randy Alcorn says if you want to know what someone loves to look at their bank statement. In other words: Your checkbook can function as a map to what you truly desire, and your greatest temptations are always aimed at what you desire.

Imagine I was able to put a list on the big screen of everything you bought over the last year. Without any name attached pretend I asked this single question.

What do you think this person loves?

What would they write about you?

## The Text:

*James 1:12-18*

*12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

*16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. 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.*

- The book of James:
  1. James is actually probably better translated Jacob (Iakobos Greek) (The Bible Project, Read Scripture: James)
  2. Jesus half-brother became a powerful and respected leader in the church during a time of persecution from Jewish leaders. (Acts 12,15; Galatians 1-2; Mark 6:3)
  3. There was also a famine and poverty during his time of leadership.
  4. The book of James is a summary of Jacob's sage wisdom from his years of leadership.
  5. He uses two primary influences: the Sermon on the Mount by his half-brother Jesus, and Proverbs.
  
- There are two things happening in the opening of James.
  1. Real hardship: Poverty and persecution.
  2. The temptation to love wrongly while facing hardship.

(Reread the scripture)

- Trials are external difficulties. Temptations are internal hungers.
- The hardship (trial) in this book is directly connected to loving inappropriately in the face of poverty and persecution.
  
- James (Jacob) teaches that loving wrongly as a Christian often shows itself in two ways: favoritism (ch 2) and a faith that is void of good works. (James 1:19; 2:14-26)
  1. Favoritism: Only giving to those that benefit you back. James (Jacob) teaches that the love of God is given freely, even to those who desperately need it and cannot repay us.
  2. Faith without good works is functionally dead. Good works do not save us, (Ephesians 2:9) but they are the means in which the kingdom of God is made manifest in this world.
    - i. By good works I mean taking "good" into the places and to the people who need it. Not merely being good to those that are good to you. The world desperately needs to hear the hope of Jesus today.

Illustration:

In light of yet another tragedy of lost life in the Florida shooting listen to the words of columnist Umair Haque as he tries to wrap his mind around the declining trajectory of American culture.

*"America's problems are revealed to be not just the everyday nuisances of a declining nation, but something more like a body suddenly attacked by unimagined diseases."* (Haque, 2018)

He calls these cultural diseases "pathologies."

Listen to some of this. I have simplified and adjusted them to be even more pointed.

- Love of violence. We condemn things like murder and rape in "real" life yet celebrate and practice it everywhere else from video games to movies. Practice makes perfect?!
- We have a true opioid epidemic. Americans are not happier, they're just all high, trying to numb themselves to pain all while living in one of the wealthiest nations in history.
- The family is collapsing. What once was a place of peace and support, especially for children and the elderly, is no longer so. We sanction off the elderly and let the state raise our children.
- The soul. We try to teach that humanity is just an evolved animal and are surprised when people actually act like such. There are dire consequences when we stop believing that people have intrinsic and eternal value.

Let me tell you what Christianity says:

We don't run from - we run into the pain with the good news.

- You are made in the image of God and have intrinsic and eternal value.
- The best life is truly yet to come and it's okay to admit that there is evil.
- You are loved.
- The true good life is not one of limitless wealth and sensual pleasure without boundary - it's one of being whole in heart before God, of knowing and embracing the ways of Jesus.
  - Any day I would put knowing Jesus up against money and sensual pleasures.
    - The dismay of the Ancient Roman aristocrats and the wholeness of the poverty stricken Christians of the early church ring out like a powerful bell.
- We, like those in the early Jerusalem church, functionally love and invest in what will burn and we neglect what we know is truly eternally valuable - people. This hypocrisy divides our hearts and makes the church impotent.
- Remember, there was deep poverty and persecution during his time of leadership. He believed out of this hardship something beautiful could be formed. In fact, he uses the word "perfect" seven times in the book. By "perfect" (teleios, Greek) he means whole and complete.
  1. Hardship forces you to focus on what is most important.
  2. Hardship forces you to let go of what has little eternal worth.
  3. Hardship doesn't actually break you, it breaks off the parts of you that are without real value. Hardship works as a powerful filter. It separates. Like the flood with Noah, the wilderness with King David, and even the poverty and persecution in the book of James, hardship strips away our idols.

- When you realize you aren't anything without your \_\_\_\_\_, that's important to know!

## Final Thoughts/Next Steps cards:

Look back at your list.

Do you own these things, or do they own you?

Five minutes after you are dead what on that list will you realize was worthless?

Is anything on the list truly eternally valuable?

How do we change what we love?

Two things come to mind. You probably won't like either.

1. Give to what you should love. Your heart follows your money. It's not the other way around. *For where your treasure is there your heart will be also.* Matthew 6:21 Literally, where you put your treasure your heart will follow. Start to live loving rightly and your heart will follow. I can prove it. Start a new investment. All the sudden you will pay attention to what it is doing! Start giving to a missionary. All the sudden you will start caring about their ministry.
2. Intercessory Prayer. This isn't just praying for what you want. It's praying God's wisdom into what you face. It's praying for God's Kingdom to come to earth! That's a different prayer!

Illustration:

Eugene Peterson in his book *Eat this Book* says that the word meditation is the word for gnawing. Like a lion gnawing on its food or a dog gnawing on a bone. It's the Hebrew word *Hagah*. To meditate on the truths of God literally means to gnaw on them. So, let's gnaw on God's truth and begin loving rightly as we pray over these things that have our hearts.

Place your hand over your card and pray, "God help me to love rightly in this area of my life."

## References:

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Lent>

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2016). (Jas 1:12–18). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

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