

Sermon Discussion Questions & Follow-up Notes
June 2, 2024
Rev. Dr. Andrew Keuer

Sermon Text: James 1:9-12

Title: “How & When to Boast” / Series: “Words that Heal”

Core Observations of the Text

James speaks to both the poor & rich in these verses, counseling them how to speak about themselves. His counsel can be generalized into three parameters for your talk about yourself:

- 1. Emphasize God’s goodness in your needs (verse 9):** The word in verse 1 is “boast” or “take pride”. It’s a speaking word, not merely a command about internal attitude. James directs this command to “poor brothers” (i.e., Christians who lost everything in the dispersal mentioned in 1:1). The principle here is that if you are willing to speak unashamedly about your needs, when God provides for you, it will bring Him praise. In verse 9, James quotes Jeremiah 9:23-24, where “the weeping prophet” counsels the residents of Jerusalem to boast not in their possessions or wisdom (which will soon be taken away as they are taken captive and removed from the city of Jerusalem) but to boast that God accompanies them into exile. The sermon referred to Augustine’s famous book *Confessions*, which is regarded as the first autobiography in world literature. Augustine follows this principle of speaking of his needs so as to highlight that his life is constituted not by his good or bad deeds but by God’s ongoing goodness to him.
- 2. Emphasize God’s coming reversal (verse 10-11):** In these verses, James quotes Isaiah 40:6-8, verses that are typically read during Advent in association with the ministry of John the Baptist. In these verses, James (drawing on Isaiah), asks us to imagine our current world system as springtime – some plants are flourishing and growing, while others are covered over. Similarly, some individuals grow wealthy and others are unable to sustain themselves. And so, James implies, if you are rich make sure you don’t forget that summertime is coming. Soon, the plants that flourished in springtime will wilt. In other words, a whole new world system is coming when God’s kingdom arrives in full. Sounds a bit like, Matthew 19:23-30, right? The upshot for our speech is that we should not boast about our place in this world’s current system, because it will soon be turned upside down. In the sermon, the young pastor from Burkina Faso and his chief understood this coming reversal!
- 3. Emphasize things in your life that God blessed (verse 12):** James pronounces a blessing on those who “persevere” - a word that is a combination of two Greek words: “under” + “to remain”. I imagine a powerlifter holding a heavy bar over his/her head, trembling under the pressure of its tremendous weight. That “remaining under” is a primary Christian duty and attitude, according to James’ letter (note: he has already touched on this theme in 1:3-4). James announces that if you “remain under” the pressures that accumulate on you because of your faith in Christ, you are blessed. And if God’s Word says you are blessed, certainly it is okay to say so yourself! In the sermon, the story was told of a family who drove across the country. Upon arrival, it was said to the young boy, “congratulations, you made this long trip – it must have been hard!” He replied, “Thanks - but all I did was just sit there!” If you are unable to solve pressures in your life, don’t despair and don’t complain, James says. Tell others that you are blessed, favored, and hopeful.

Questions to Ponder & Discuss

1. This is a tough topic (talk about self) and a tough bible passage! Why does God give us “tough passages”?
2. Why is the current world system referred to as “springtime” and God’s future referred to as “summertime”?
3. What is an example of how you can give credit to God for a success in your life? How can you give credit to God for his future grace when you are in a difficult situation? Which of these is harder?

Books cited in the sermon:

Confessions by Augustine
Ego Trip by Glynn Harrison