

**"True Faith and Promises"****James 5:12**

**Introduction:** Today as we come back to the book of James we are again stepping into James 5 and today we will focus upon just one verse which James recorded. It seems to be a verse that is really out of context at first glance but I believe when we look at what is happening in the lives of those whom James is writing to we can see that the verse fits perfectly.

James is writing to Jewish believers who were being persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ. To be more specific in this section which is before us in chapter 5 he is addressing the poor believers who were being afflicted by the wealthy people of their day.

Now the verse which we are going to look at is applicable to everyone's life but at the time of the writing of this letter I believe it was directed to those who were poor and who were dealing with the mistreatment from the rich. So we will consider it in this context then we shall make the application to all of our lives. Let us look at the verse.

**Notice James 5:12**

I need to explain a few thoughts here and then we shall get into the verse.

The subject of "swearing" in this verse is not the practice of using the Lord's name in vain or using some kind of slang as we often here people use today where they desire to express their thoughts. If this were the "swearing" like we know swearing to be then it would be referred to as "filthy communications".

**Colossians 3:8**

<sup>8</sup> *But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, filthy communication out of your mouth.*

So this is not filthy communication which we would know as "swearing" but while we are on the subject this should never be a part of our vocabulary. So what is James concerned about here?

The subject of "swearing" here is the practice which was commonly known by the Jews as "swearing an oath" or "making a vow". Now when we started into this letter I had told you that James had sat at the feet of Jesus while Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount

so he absorbed all that Jesus had said in that Sermon. We have seen glimpses of the Sermon on the Mount all through the book of James.

This is exactly where the subject of "swearing" came from also. Jesus had spoken on the subject also and James then incorporates the subject into his letter. I need to point out that the subject is one of great importance and this we know because of what James says here.

### **Notice James 5:12**

James holds this subject far above all things. Whatever it is that James is telling his readers here is certainly of great importance.

#### **I. The Main Thought**

I want to first of all point out the main thought in this verse then we will get into the background. The exhortation within this verse is that when you tell someone you are going to do something then be sure that you follow through with your promise. Let me set it in the context of the passage. James is writing to Jews who were being afflicted and they were serving as day workers. Because of the way they were being treated there would be the temptation to attempt to justify not following through with their promises. If they were asked by the rich to do something and then they were not paid as they should have been there would be the temptation not to follow through with their vow or their promise.

This is where the exhortation found in this verse comes in. As believers they were to be people who were true to their word. If they made a promise then they were to follow through with the promise. Their yea was to be yea and their nay was to be nay. In other words they were to be true to what it would be which they had promised.

But if that was what James is saying then why does he talk about swearing or making an oath? This question brings us to the next point.

#### **II. The Practice in James' Day**

Now remember that I had told you that this thought came from what James had heard at the Sermon on the Mount so let me show you what Jesus had said in His sermon.

### **Notice Matthew 5:33-37**

<sup>33</sup> *Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:*

<sup>34</sup> *But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne:*

<sup>35</sup> *Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.*

<sup>36</sup> *Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.*

<sup>37</sup> *But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.*

You can turn to Matthew or look on the screen. Here in this passage Jesus was correcting the teaching of the religious leaders. They had taken the Scriptures and they had twisted them to fit their own lives so as to make themselves appear to be spiritual.

Now the opening statement which Jesus made here was the teaching of the religious leaders but they stopped short when they made this statement. They said that a man was not to "forswear" himself. This meant that a man was not to lie. Then they went on to say that a man was to perform unto the Lord his oath which he had made.

Now this looks good on the surface but they neglected to teach something. That was that oaths were only to be made on certain occasions. They were not to be CARELESSLY entered into and they were not to be entered into for every little situation.

**Let me explain what an OATH was:**

An oath is simply making a promise and calling on God to be a witness and to bring a curse if the "oath" is not carried out. This word actually means "to bind something" therefore an oath is binding meaning that we are to be bound to the promise to be sure and to be true to our word. To call on God to be a Witness is for the purpose of strengthening the commitment by knowing there are consequences when the oath is broken.

The religious leaders knew the seriousness of the oath.

But they believed they had found a way to escape their commitment in an oath.

**Notice Matthew 5:33 again.**

*Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:*

The end of the verse will help us to understand what the religious leaders were doing.

Here was the practice of the religious leaders: they would enter into an oath or they would make a vow and they would swear by something other than God's name. Then if they decided to not uphold their promise and someone called them on this they would then reply by saying that they had never used swear by the name of the Lord. So the teaching of the religious leaders was that if you swore by anything other than the Lord's name then you were not required to uphold your promise.

It would be like someone today not upholding their promise and then telling you that they had their fingers crossed. In other words they would tell you that the crossed fingers freed them from commitment. That was exactly what the religious leaders taught. But they were ignoring what had been recorded in the Old Testament.

### **Numbers 30:2**

*<sup>2</sup> If a man vow a vow **unto the LORD**, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.*

Jesus then corrected this false teaching by saying that there was not one thing they could swear by that did not bring God into the oath as a witness.

### **Notice Matthew 5:34-36**

Jesus was telling them that when they made a promise they would be held accountable to the promise. If they swore by heaven or the hair on their head they would still be held accountable. God knew every promise and every oath which they entered into.

Listen to the words of William Barclay on this thought:

*"Here is a great eternal truth: light cannot be divided into compartments in some of which God is involved, and in others of which He is not involved. There cannot be one kind of language in the church and another kind of language in the home. There cannot be one kind of standard of conduct in the church and another standard of conduct in the business world. The fact is that God does not need to be invited into certain departments of life and kept out of others; He is everywhere, all through life, and every activity of life. He hears not only the words which are spoken in His name, He hears all words, and there cannot be any such thing as a form of words which evades bringing God into any transaction. We will regard all promises as sacred if we remember that all promises are made in the presence of God."*

The religious leaders were teaching that it was acceptable to break an oath if you had never sworn by the Lord's name but Jesus said that God is everywhere.

Jesus later addressed this very topic again because it was out of hand in His day as it is in our day also.

**Matthew 23:16-22**

*<sup>16</sup> Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!*

*<sup>17</sup> Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?*

*<sup>18</sup> And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.*

*<sup>19</sup> Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?*

*<sup>20</sup> Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.*

*<sup>21</sup> And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.*

*<sup>22</sup> And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.*

**Matthew 5:37**

*<sup>37</sup> But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.*

Here in this verse Jesus makes it clear how it should be. If we say yes to something then be true to that and if we say no to something let us be true to that also.

**"for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil"** - This means any variance from this reveals the wickedness of the heart.

Now let us get back to James.

**Notice James 5:12**

Now we can clearly see the thought of James here came from the Sermon on the Mount.

Now I need to stop here and make something very clear. Neither James nor Jesus was saying that it is a sin to enter into a vow or an oath. There are people who will take this

text and Matthew 5 and they will refuse to take an oath in court or in any other place. That is not what is being taught here.

Oath and vows are for special occasions and court and marriage would both fall into the category of "special occasion".

### **Conclusion:**

Let me bring this into our lives for a moment. If you are saved then you are a child of God and we are then to represent Him as we pass through this life. Now God is true to every one of His promises.

In the Old Testament God made a promise to Abraham that he would be a father of a nation then God entered into an oath so as to confirm His promise. Now watch what the writer of Hebrews says.

### **Hebrews 6:17-18**

*<sup>17</sup> Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath:*

*<sup>18</sup> That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:*

The 2 immutable things are His PROMISES and His CHARACTER. God cannot lie. We therefore represent Him in this world so we better be sure we are always true to our promises.

### **Numbers 30:2**

*<sup>2</sup> If a man vow a vow **unto the LORD**, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.*

### **Ecclesiastes 5:4-6**

*<sup>4</sup> When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.*

*<sup>5</sup> Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.*

*<sup>6</sup> Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin;*