



Ed Miller
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JAMES 4:9-12

I am preaching through the book of James and it's a privilege to do that. I'm very excited about this particular sermon, but before I dive in I want to pray again for us, and not only for us but for the persecuted church. These are perilous days, but important days. I love that last song we sang. Even though these are perilous days, God is still in control and there's nothing that's too big for Him to handle. God is in control. He is working out His plan. But these are perilous days.

It seems that evil is on the loose everywhere, here and around the world. It seems like Satan is having his way in many ways. We look at the election coming up. We look at some of the issues in our world. We look at some of the war and evil that's happening all around the world. There's some pretty bad stuff happening.

Maybe most importantly we look at our country, how our country is moving away from God, and seemingly at an accelerating pace people are turning their back. God's word says that if His people will *humble ourselves and pray*, He will *heal our land*. That's a promise from God.

So I want to ask that you bow with me again and I'm going to pray again. I know in one part or another we're all thinking about the election on Tuesday. Many are still thinking about how we're going to vote, or whether we're going to vote, or how we're going to vote on one of the questions or the local elections or the presidential election. There's a lot resting on this election. So we need wisdom. But even more than that we need as a country to turn back to God. To turn to Him and ask Him to heal this land. So I'm going to pray on our behalf that God would heal our land, and we're going to pray for the persecuted church.

It is pray for the persecuted Sunday today. Many churches around the world are praying for those who are persecuted. I consider the church in America to be part of the persecuted church now, as secular ungodly influences continue to press in around us. We're going to find that no matter what happens with this election we're going to be challenged. It's a challenging time. There are people in worse situations.

You may notice after the service every week there's a few of us that gather together. We are praying for the persecuted every week. I invite you to join us. It's a little group we meet who knows where we'll end up, but a little group of people huddled together. If you'd like to pray for the persecuted today, do so. One of the things that guides us is a little app from The Voice of the Martyrs that gives us one thing to pray about every day.

Today we're being asked to pray for the house churches of Tunisia. They can't gather together in public like we do for fear of persecution, so they have to gather in secret, in homes. But that church is alive there. So we're praying for them.

Join me in prayer.

[PRAYER] Lord, we come humbly before you. Lord, I beseech thee; I beseech you, on behalf of my brothers and sisters, to heal our land. So many in our land are turning inward toward themselves and are turning away from you. We're turning to the very essence of what Satan would have us to do. Turning to ourselves and looking to ourselves for answers, turning away from your truth and your ways and your word. Father, we need your help. We need to humble ourselves and we need to pray. So we pray now for our brothers and sisters in this country. We pray that you would open their eyes to see what's happening and to turn back to you. We pray that for the world, that you would cause people in the world to turn to you. To have their eyes set upon you. Lord, the troubles, the evil, the war, the difficulties in the world, those things can be tools that you use to turn people back to you. So we ask you to use those things, the troubles, the perilous things in our day. Help us to turn back to you. We need you, Lord Jesus.

We lift up the persecuted believers around the world and in this country. Father, we ask that you would strengthen them through your power and your Holy Spirit. That they would be able to put all their burdens on your capable shoulders, as we say, because you can carry those burdens. Some are in immediate fear for their life. Some have lost their homes. Father, would you bless them? Would you fill them with your power and your Spirit? That they would walk with you and find joy, and that many around them would come to know you because of your work in their lives. Fill us with your joy as we serve you, as we deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow you. Bring us joy. It's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

If you have your Bible you can turn to James 4. We've been working through James for quite a while now. A few years I think we've been in James every once in a while.

I want to take us back to the very beginning before we even read this passage because you'll remember that in James 1 James says this crazy thing. He says – *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds.* From the human perspective that sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? How can we consider it joy when we face trials and persecutions and troubles? How can we do that? As we learned and as we looked at that, we can do that because we know what is coming. We know what God is doing. God is bringing trials to sharpen us, to refine us, and to bring us joy, and to lift us up. That's what He's doing.

Now let's read our section for today in James 4:9. *Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

Now let's look at that first section. It seems kind of almost contradictory to what we sang about this morning in worship. Doesn't it? Rather than turning our mourning into joy, he says turn your joy to mourning. Again, whoa, wait a minute. What's going on? James, what are you doing to us? What are you saying? *Grieve, mourn and wail*. Almost like it's a good thing.

Well I want to suggest to you that it is a good thing. Grieving, mourning, and wailing can be a very good thing. Not an easy thing, but a good thing. There's a time for rejoicing, but there's a time to mourn and a time to experience gloom. *Change your laughter to mourning and change your joy to gloom*. How is that possible?

Quite a number of years ago now I went to see a counselor. I was having some struggles and challenges with this crazy emotion called anger. Maybe some of you have had such struggles and challenges yourself. I realized I needed help. I needed to figure out what was going on. I went to a counselor. I had some father issues that I had to work out, things that I was upset with my father. That was just part of it, but one part of it.

What would happen is we would talk about things that my father did that weren't so great. My father wasn't the best father in the world. I would always say something negative about my father, but then I'd always stop and defend him and say, "But he wasn't that bad," or something to that effect. My counselor stopped me and said, "Ed, don't do that. Call sin sin. Call evil evil and recognize that it is and it's not good." Some of the things that the way my father raised me were not good. They were not God's ideal. Don't defend him. Call it what it is.

That in life, in general is something we need to do. Something that's bad, something that's wrong, something that's sinful, something that's evil, whether it's in our lives, in other's, in society, whatever, we need to call it what it is. If it's evil, it's evil. And that's a cause for mourning and for sadness. We don't want to jump too quickly to just writing it off or excusing it.

Now another situation. Some of you may have noticed I was not with you last weekend. I had the privilege of going back to an event run by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship called The Big Event. Over 500 college students gathered together for a weekend to hear from the Lord, to grow in the Lord, and to be challenged in the Lord.

You may not know, but for most of my life I worked for as a missionary for college students with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. That's been the bulk of my life, over thirty years invested in working in almost every college campus in New Jersey and some in New York for most of my life. I hadn't been back to this particular event, which I actually started. I hadn't been back to this event for about four years, since 2012. So it was really great to go back for a number of reasons, which I won't go into. You can ask me more about it if you'd like.

But I experienced wailing. Anybody ever experienced wailing before, what it actually sounds like? I'm not going to demonstrate it for you right now, I promise. But wow. Words escape me. It's eerie, it's frightening, it's upsetting. But let me tell you why this wailing was so good.

On Saturday night at this particular event after students had been in sessions and hearing God's word and being challenged in many ways (the evening session is worship and then another

teaching), everyone was challenged to respond to Jesus in some way. Many had never committed their lives to Christ and many committed their lives to Jesus for the first time. Others needed healing in their lives or they needed something, a barrier or sin, to be dealt with in their lives so that they could move forward.

So at the end there was a healing prayer time. Staff and volunteers were around the edges of the auditorium and around the back, and students would approach someone if they wanted prayer, not unlike we do at the end of the service. Well this young woman came and got prayer and she just started wailing, crying so desperately. The staff that were praying for her ended up taking her outside and you could still hear the wailing. It was such wailing, so loud, so passionate, so deep.

Here's why wailing is good. Here's the story of this young woman. She had given her life to Christ earlier in this year and she had been completely rejected by her mother, and I mean completely rejected, disowned, cast out. At that moment, during that worship time and during that time of calling God to give things to Him, it just all hit her. The rejection just hit her like a ton of bricks. She was overcome with grief and she was mourning. Her wailing was mourning. Mourning the loss of a mother, the loss of something important.

It was actually hard to hear it. I wasn't the one praying. It was hard to hear it from a distance even. But it was good because what happened to this young lady as the result of it, she needed to go through that so that she could then be healed and release it.

The next day she found release, she found joy. But she had to go through that period of mourning. I think that's something we often tend to do. We tend to want to quickly put aside difficult things. We want to ignore them or tuck them away or bury them and not deal with them. Sometimes we need to deal with them. Like we need to mourn the direction that our country is headed. We should be mourning.

Sometimes we can too quickly say, "Well I can't do anything about it, so I'm just not going to think about it." We need to mourn. It doesn't mean that we're hopeless though, does it. For some people this could go to hopelessness. This kind of thing could lead us down a path where we feel defeated and hopeless. It could. But it doesn't have to and it shouldn't for those of us in Christ. It shouldn't mean that.

As I was working with my counselor through these issues in my life weekly, he reminded me that forgiveness is all that much more powerful. When you're forgiving someone for real evil or real sin, that is genuine forgiveness and it's powerful and it's releasing. When you look at a wrong and you can pray and mourn and be sad and bring it to the Lord, we can still recognize the truth that God will lift us up. So the end of these two verses – *God will lift us up* when we *humble ourselves before the Lord*. That's what this is, isn't it? Weeping, mourning, grieving is humbling ourselves before the Lord. We're feeling the pain. He lifts us up and brings us joy.

The final message on that weekend, on Sunday morning, people stood and told others publicly how they had made commitments to the Lord. The message was on the joy of the gospel.

Something happened that I've never seen before. I have never experienced this in my life. People stood and said they had given their life to Christ. One of the young ladies that stood interrupted the speaker. The speaker was now challenging everyone who had not yet made that decision and was on the edge to still commit to giving their lives to Christ. This young lady had just given her life to Christ the day before, and you could see the joy on her face. She was looking around in a pleading way with every other student in the room and she said, "Last night I gave my life to Christ and I was filled with so much joy it was overflowing. Would you join me? Would you give your life to Christ and find that joy?"

I never saw anything like that in my life. Someone so bold who had just given their life to Christ made that passion plea to her brothers and sisters. One person stood up. Who knows what happened in the hearts of others, but one person stood up. Powerful.

Mourning and grieving can be good things. I think of Hebrews 12:2. *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* Jesus Himself mourned, had to go through this terrible sadness and shame and physical agony and pain for the joy set before Him. We can't get to the joy without going through the pain sometimes.

How do you look at pain? How do you look at wailing, mourning? In my natural flesh I tend to see it as a bad thing. That's changing for me. Because I think mourning, sadness, trials, all these things can be things that God uses to bring greater joy into our lives because we serve Him and He has committed to lifting us up. Praise the Lord.

Jesus told His disciples, "*Deny yourself daily, take up your cross, and follow me.*" Denying yourself, taking up your cross, that's grieving, sacrificing, mourning, wailing. That's what that is. That's not easy. That's tough stuff. *Consider it joy, my brothers and sisters, when you face those trials* because there's light at the end of that. There's joy in the midst of that because Jesus is alive. He's alive and He will lift us up and bring joy. Don't be afraid of that. There's nothing to fear. God is with us. His shoulders are broad enough.

I thought about actually stopping there, but we're going to finish this section with a little more time. We're going to go back to the passage. Let's continue now. This is verse 11 and I'm going to read this again.

As I started maybe three years ago to preach in the book of James, this is the passage that I was looking most forward to preaching on because I think it's a very misunderstood concept in the church and in the world. So let's look at this. Let's look at this idea of judging.

Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

This idea of judging is something that gets thrown at Christians all the time. It gets thrown at us. Any time we speak up, say something about truth or about that we believe, we're accused of

judging. “Why are you judging me? Why are you judging us?” So it’s an important thing for us to understand, clearly, but it’s a complicated issue. It’s complicated because the Bible is complicated about this.

First of all, we are taught in the Bible as we are in this passage *do not judge*. Do not judge. But we are also taught in the Bible that we should judge. Let’s look at the passage up here in John 7:24. *Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly.*

If I’m reading that correctly, that’s saying we should judge, we’re supposed to judge. The context of this command is Jesus healing on the Sabbath. He was challenged by the religious leaders. They didn’t like that because they had written more about what the Sabbath was all about. They had gone beyond the commandment of the Bible to keep the Sabbath holy and they had specified what that should look like. Healing didn’t fit into what they thought was appropriate in keeping the Sabbath. They added things to the law and they were concerned about the appearance of this. It appeared as if Jesus was a lawbreaker because He was breaking their laws. They were more concerned about Him breaking their laws than they were about the heart of the matter, that God was doing a work and healing someone. So they were wrong.

That’s why Jesus said stop judging, don’t judge based on appearance, what things look like at first, on first impression. Look at it carefully. Look deeply. Go to the heart of the matter and judge correctly or rightly.

Now that still probably is not enough. I would still be confused. Let’s try to understand this more. Let’s unpack it by looking at what it means to judge correctly first.

We discern and judge all the time, don’t we? Everybody does. We make decisions about things all the time. We make judgments. The question is do we judge rightly or wrongly? We appoint people as judges, supposedly wise people (not always such), but supposedly wise, learned people (they’re wise in the world’s way anyhow, human wisdom), but we appoint them to judge, to make judgments.

What happens in our courts all the time? Judgments are made. Judgments are made about the law, about evidence, about truth. All kinds of judgments are made today. So it can’t be that we’re not supposed to judge. We’re supposed to judge correctly, judge rightly.

When a human judge is judging correctly, they’re considering the law, the evidence, and the truth, the situation and the circumstances, and they’re judging correctly. Not by just by first impressions. Do some judges do that by first impressions? Do they see a particular lawyer or a particular defendant and do they make a snap judgment? They probably do. They have a bias in their mind or something happens that probably does happen. But that’s not correct judging. We’re not supposed to judge on first impressions or appearances alone. We’re supposed to look deeper and understand things more carefully.

So now let’s look at the wrong kind of judging. Maybe that will help a little bit more to bring clarity. What does this kind of judging look like? Well first in this passage in John that I read,

judging seems to have to do with laws and ideas and beliefs and actions that are deeper than what are apparent.

The Jewish leaders were judging Jesus, the person, and calling Him a lawbreaker. They were judging His intent, His motives, without really understanding the intent of God's law. They were judging by appearances. They were drawing a negative conclusion based on wrong information and appearance. We're not supposed to do that kind of judging.

Now let's look at James. James really sheds some light. Look at this section in James. It gives us a real idea about this wrong kind of judging. First of all in the middle of that section he talks about the law of God and God the Judge. We can't judge the law because the law comes from the ultimate judge, God Himself, who is perfect. He's holy. Everything that comes from God is good and set and right.

Now at first glance, any of us that are honest and real when we read the Bible there are certain things about God's law that we don't quite get. It doesn't make sense to our human mind. So we think, "How can that be true?" A lot of people challenge God for being unjust, uncaring. There are lots of things people challenge God about. How can He allow anyone to go to hell, for instance. People don't like that. That doesn't feel good. So when we see something like that, our first response is God is really unloving. We can't do that. God is the God of the universe. He is perfect and pure. So the judge's law is to judge God Himself. We're not allowed to do that. We're not supposed to slander others. Speak against a person or judge our neighbor. Those are the three things that are mentioned in the passage. That sheds light on judging, doesn't it?

What does it mean to slander a person? I actually had to really think hard about this a number of years ago because I was running Lawrence Little League. I was the president of Lawrence Little League. I was being slandered, so working with my lawyer and trying to figure out whether to take any kind of action or whatever. I decided not to.

Slander is in essence saying something incorrect about another person and demeaning their character and bringing some kind of harm to them. It has to result in some harm. Slander is taking partial truths or half-truths and making them into something that demeans another person, that puts that person down, or says they're a lawbreaker or something like that. We're not supposed to do that. We're not supposed to slander our brothers and sisters. We're not supposed to speak against a person. Isn't that interesting as well?

We judge ideas all the time. We judge what people think, what people believe, but we're supposed to be very careful about judging the person. Because who the person is is in their heart, their motives. We don't really know what's in a person's heart. Only God really knows what's in a person's heart. We have to be really careful about judging people's motives, what's in their heart based on those appearances, what they see, or even a couple things that they do.

There's a third passage that really helps us as well in Matthew. Maybe the most helpful passage about this subject. You can look at the whole passage, but I'm just going to focus on this one part. *Do not judge or you will be judged.* I'm going to paraphrase the rest. This is a very well

known passage. Jesus is talking. Why do you try to take a peck of dust out of someone else's eye when you've got a plank in your own eye?

In other words, why when you're blind are you trying to look in somebody else and figure out what their problem is when you've got a plank in your eye, meaning you can't see. If you have a plank in your eye (picture what a plank would look like), you're not seeing too well. Why do you try to pick a little speck out of someone else's eye when you can't see? That makes a lot of sense, doesn't it.

But Jesus said what we do is another way of judging incorrectly. We judge incorrectly, not even being able to see. So maybe we hear something about somebody else or we hear a rumor and we decide that that person is evil because of a rumor that we hear or something to that effect. So we judge them.

Before we can judge correctly then, we need to examine ourselves. We need to look ourselves in the mirror and say, "Lord, is there anything in me that's causing me to see unclearly? I'm not seeing clearly." Some bias, some sin, some level of arrogance, something that's causing us not to see rightly. It's keeping us from seeing clearly.

But here again, we're not told not to judge in that sense. Because we're supposed to take the plank out of our eye and then help our brother or sister by taking the speck. So we do help somebody else. We just don't judge the essence of their being.

We're all in the same boat. We're all sinners. We've all sinned. We've all rebelled against God, and we've all put ourselves on the throne of our life. We've all taken leadership and we've all turned away from what God says is true or good. We've all done that. So every one of us are guilty sinners.

The very heart of the gospel is that every one of us is loved still by God. God wants us to turn away from that and turn back to Him. That's the gospel message right there. God wants every one of us. The most apparently evil person (when appearances look that way), as long as that person is still living, God still loves that person and wants that person to turn away from that evilness and turn to Him. He wants that. So we need to see people like that.

Now we are commanded to judge correctly, though. Aren't we?

I'm going to give you two examples that are very relevant today in our world, I think. I have done the due diligence myself of examining myself over the last twenty years, probably ten to twenty years on these issues. I believe I've taken the plank out of my eye and I can see clearly on this one. Maybe you have and maybe you haven't. These are two issues that are examples that are extremely relevant.

One is abortion, what we believe about life, in essence. There's a narrative out there that says we cannot tell a woman what to do with her body. The government cannot tell a person what to do with their body. Let me tell you why to judge that correctly we've got to look at that carefully and say, "Wait a minute. Hold on. The government does that all the time." The government tells

us what kind of things we can and cannot do with our money, with our time, with our property, with our lives. The government restricts us in all kinds of ways. I could ask each one of you and you could list something that the government says you cannot do.

One of those is we cannot murder someone. Well somehow in this debate about abortion we've been able to separate that that baby in the womb is not a person. So we can discard that person. We can't stop someone from making the choice to kill.

I say yes we can. We can. Especially even if there's debate about whether that's a human being all along through the development, certainly in the last trimester, because you can go along and you can see videos of those things, abortions and doctors saying I've done these things and I've torn these babies apart in the uterus, and that's a person.

But the narrative is we can't tell somebody what to do with their body. Well you see the wrong in that. Because we do it all the time. That's what government is for in a sense is to restrain evil. The government restrains evil.

There's another one that's really very much reality for us right now. This has to do with sexuality. There's another narrative or philosophy out there right now out there that's politically correct that takes sexuality and gender and separates them. Your sex is biological. Your gender is psychological. Biological, psychological. Your sexuality is the parts that you have. Your gender is what you think about who you are, how you feel about yourself.

The Bible does not make that distinction. The traditional biblical interpretation of sexuality is that God created us. He created us male and female. Gender and sexuality are the same. If we're born as a woman, our mind is woman. If we're born as a man, our mind is man.

Can there be a problem in our mind? Yes. There can be a problem in our mind. I'm not denying the fact that people that think they're the other sex have some real issues going on. They have some real problems going on in their mind. Real issues. It's real. I'm not saying it's not real. But our tendency is to fix the physical, fix the sexual, and not worry about the mental. That's not the way we treat other things. If someone's bipolar, we don't just say, "Okay, that's fine. Just keep on being bipolar." We try to heal them. We try to change their mental problem. The Bible is real here.

Again, this organization that I love and worked for for most of my life, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, is on the hot seat right now. They have just reaffirmed their commitment that has been a part of the organization's stand for seventy-five years, its whole existence, for standing for the traditional, biblical interpretation of sexuality, which is God created them male and female. They haven't changed anything. But now because of the way things are in the politically correct world we live in, they are on the hot seat. It's a social media hot storm right now that they're experiencing. They are being challenged like crazy. But they're standing on that.

What I love about what InterVarsity is doing is InterVarsity is still reaching out to people who have gay tendencies or transsexual tendencies in their mind, and they're finding those people are

coming to Christ because they're confused, they're hurting. They need Jesus just like everybody else does.

We all need Jesus. It's another example of discerning or judging. I don't think I have any axe to grind. I don't think I have bias. I think I'm judging rightly. I welcome conversation afterwards if you disagree about that. But I think I'm judging rightly.

Those are just two examples. I could have used a wealth of other examples about how we can discern. I would love to talk about the governor, about our state, and some the things that are going on with him, and some of the things that are happening in the whole realm of the scandals, and the things that are happening in the ballot. We are going to be voting on ballot question number two. I'm not going to go into that. You can talk to me afterwards if you like to talk about that.

I hope the message is clear. We are supposed to discern and judge, but we're supposed to discern and judge rightly, correctly. That means having the information, having the facts. Not just on first appearances, and judging those facts and ideas and not ultimately judging the worth of the person. That's the kind of judging that James is talking about that's not good. We shouldn't ever be putting each other down, shaming other people. We should be discussing things on the merits of the issues and of the case. I hope that's clear.

I'd like to just take a moment and pause. I know we're late. But let's just reflect quietly. I'd like to ask each of you just to think through what you've heard and how God is speaking to you and then I'll close.

[PRAYER] Lord, we thank you that we have the privilege of studying it, of learning about it. Thank you for giving it to us, Lord. It's not always easy for us to understand. When you look at various passages, understand the truth, and understand what we're to do about it. That's why you sent your Holy Spirit to live in each one of us so that we could have a counselor. So I ask for each of my brothers and sisters that you help us to take what we've learned here now and to apply it and to live it out. We want to take Jesus home. We want to take Jesus home and live for you. That means denying ourselves daily, taking up our cross, and following you, letting you lead us. It's not always going to be pleasant, it's not always going to be popular, and sometimes it's going to be hard. But as we humble ourselves before you, you promise to lift us up. And in that lifting up, you give us joy. Thank you, Lord. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.