

LIFE AFTER FAITH
A STUDY THROUGH THE BOOK OF JAMES

LESSON 4 – THE DANGER OF DOUBTING – JAMES 1:6-8

In American Sign Language, the sign for “please” is made by placing your right hand over the center of your chest, and moving it in a clockwise motion. This reminds us that when we say “please” to God, asking Him for something, it truly matters what’s in our heart.

As we saw last time, the fifth verse of James chapter one ends with the phrase, “...you should ask God, and it will be given to you.” That’s a wonderful promise regarding the availability of divine wisdom to everyone who will simply ask God for it.

Now in verse six, James adds a twist. He says, “But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt.” James is teaching us that while we have an open invitation to ask God for the things we need, if our request is sent with doubt, it will not be answered. When we doubt God and His Word, we cripple our prayers before they ever leave our mouths. Doubting prayer is worthless prayer because it questions the very God to whom it is addressed.

Because doubts can paralyze our ability to pray, they are seriously dangerous to our Christian life. It is for that reason that James gives us the warning. Looking at verses 6-8, I want us to notice some things James teaches us about doubts and the danger they pose to our relationship with Christ.

Doubts Arise From Our Indecision

In verse 6, James says, “The one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.” This is an interesting phrase. Jesus used a similar phrase in Matthew 16 when He told the Pharisees they “cannot interpret the signs of the times.” The idea here is someone coming to God without the ability to discern or decide. James is speaking of indecision.

The Christian who is doubting and indecisive is having a battle of the mind. He is struggling within in himself about what he truly believes. The spiritual problem of a doubter is that they cannot make the decision to fully believe what God has said in His Word. They want to believe His promises, and at times they seem to; but when they look at their circumstances, crunch the numbers and consider the odds, they begin to waver.

James actually paints us sad picture of someone who doubts God. “The one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.” The person who doubts God, and who is indecisive about trusting Him, is a person who never seems to have any calm in their life. Everything is always being tossed around, and peace is an unfamiliar virtue.

They can’t say, “It is well with my soul” when the “sorrows like sea billows roll.” Why? Because they’ve never decided to fully trust God. The Bible is a note to all of God’s children that says, “Trust your Father!” Those who waver and doubt have not yet decided to put that note in their heart and let it calm their life.

Doubts Account For Our Ineffectiveness

I think you’ll agree that James can never be accused of pulling punches. Look at what he says in verse 7, “That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.” James takes the opportunity to

connect our doubt to our inability to accomplish anything through prayer. The challenge here is to see if much of our ineffectiveness in the Christian life is because of doubt.

If we aren't careful, we'll fall into the trap of thinking that God will overlook the presence of a little doubt in our life. We are tempted to believe that God will give us credit simply for asking Him, even when we're not sure that He can or will give us the thing we are requesting.

So often, we are guilty of praying with the mindset that it doesn't hurt to ask. We pray, not really believing that God is going to answer, but hoping that maybe...to our surprise...He will. James completely blows this type of thinking out of the water. He tells us that doubt and faith are opposite forces and that if we pray with doubt in our heart, we should not expect God to answer our prayers. We can certainly pray, "Lord, help our unbelief", but we can't pray, "Lord, overlook our unbelief."

In light of that truth, if we are living a Christian life in which we are not seeing God answer our prayers, we must ask ourselves whether or not we are doubting in our trust of God. Now, there are those today who teach that if you just have enough faith, you can get God to do what you want him to do.

The issue here is not whether our faith is sufficient, but whether it is steady. Do we consistently and continually trust God or are we wavering between faith and unbelief. If you trust God today but doubt Him tomorrow, James says that is the reason you're not seeing your prayers answered.

Doubts Attest To Our Instability

Now before you start thinking that doubt is only an issue when it comes time to pray, listen to what James says in verse 8, "Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do." The danger of doubts is greater than just a powerless prayer life. Doubt points to an underlying instability in all areas of our Christian life. The idea here is of someone who thinks or believes two different ways.

Far too many Christians live unstable lives. They are up today and down tomorrow. They will tell you God is good one day, but they will think He is gone the next. They are unstable, unsettled, unsure and unhappy. When your Christian life is like riding a roller-coaster, James says the root of that instability is a double-mind of doubt.

Notice that James doesn't say that a double minded person is just unstable in his prayer life. The doubt that derails their prayer life also destabilizes every other aspect of their life. You may think that doubting God and struggling to believe His Word will only hinder your ability to pray. James says that a double minded person's whole life is hindered by this condition.

Is there instability in your marriage, your friendships, your work life or your church life? Do you feel like your commitments in life are up and down, hot and cold? It's your unwillingness to simply believe God and His Word that has the effect of unsettling every single aspect of your life. James says that when we ask God for things with indecisive doubts in our hearts, that is directly connected to the instability that marks the rest of our life.

James teaches us that we have the awesome privilege to come to God and ask Him for wisdom or whatever else we need for our Christian life. However, he also warns that when we ask, we must ask in faith...without a doubt in our mind as to the truth of God and His Word. If we want the things we ask for, we can't let our faith be divided by doubt and unbelief. Let us once and for all take God at His Word, believe He is Who He claims to be and ask IN FAITH for the things we need!