

A People of Faith in A Time of Fear (Covid 19 series 1)

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[0 : 00] What's up, One Harbor? This is Donnie here. If you are new joining us, I'm one of the pastors here at One Harbor Church, and we are just so thankful that you are joining in with us as we, in love, really alongside countless churches around the world, step back from gathering together in a large group setting in an effort to protect folks in our community who may be more susceptible to COVID-19 and to hopefully help reduce the spread of the coronavirus, which really threatens all kinds of things, including threatening to overwhelm our healthcare system.

It is really hard for us not to get together on Sunday. This is not something we're really excited about, and it was a tough decision for us, but in a lot of ways, it was easy if it helps.

It's in times like this, we can, I think, be mindful of our brothers and sisters around the world who never get to meet in large groups because of persecution. It's also times like this where we realize how much we do take for granted on a regular basis as Americans, and my hope is that on the other side of this pandemic, we will emerge better.

I don't like hurricanes at all. I grew up liking them because it meant surf, and it meant that we didn't have school, but that was a pretty juvenile approach to the whole thing. Now as an adult, I don't like hurricanes, but I love what they help us see in ourselves.

I love that they help us see things that are good and things that are bad. The bad stuff, you know, it like emerges to the surface when we don't have power for a week or whatever the case may be, and man, we didn't even know that stuff was there, but now we've seen it, and now we can actually address it.

[1 : 49] And alongside that, there's this good that like rises up, you know, in a hurricane. We almost surprise ourselves sometimes by the way that we love and we serve it, and we didn't know that was in there.

And now we see it, and we can actually leverage it. In the same way, we're gonna find out things about ourselves we already have through this tough season.

We're gonna find out where we really put our hope. We're gonna find out what we really care about the most. And if we let it, this challenging moment can change us for the better.

It can make us more mindful of those whose lives feel like this all the time. They always feel just overwhelmed by fear and worry, anxiety, or who always are kept inside because of sickness and immune deficiencies.

It can make us more mindful of those people. It can make us more thankful for simple things, things like toilet paper, or whatever. This is the moment where everyone would have hopefully laughed at that.

[2 : 51] It can make us more diligent in fighting for community. You know, we can so easily take gathering together for granted, and then it's taken away from us. And this can make us more diligent.

It can make us see how much we really need each other instead of treating it like a luxury. It can make us more prayerful, more thoughtful, et cetera. And that's what I'm hoping will happen on the other side of this.

I'd like just to take a few moments to walk us through a passage of Scripture. Now, you may be thinking, gosh, you know, where do you even start in the Bible finding a passage that would really help in a time like this? And really, that's the opposite of the challenge that you really find because so much of the Bible was written to people who were suffering terribly.

They were suffering from war, or famine, or plagues, or persecution, all kinds of suffering. So much of the Bible actually speaks to an audience that was suffering tremendously.

Additionally, the entire Bible shouts how good God is, how faithful God is. And so it really means that the challenge is not, you know, figuring out what we could possibly say, but, you know, figuring out what not to say, you know, just honing in on something.

[3 : 59] And so after prayerfully considering all of that, I finally landed on helping us look at the first chapter of the book of James to just serve us in this moment.

James has written to Christians who have been persecuted to the point where they have been led to, they can only meet in homes. And so they're no longer able to meet large groups.

Now they have to meet in homes and some of them are experiencing extreme poverty and lots of them are experiencing fear and worry. And so there's hints of all of that for us right now.

We are meeting in homes. As I speak, this is what we're doing. We're meeting in homes instead of large groups. We're watching our economy suffer tremendous blows. Banks are being inundated with calls of terrified small business owners who live paycheck to paycheck and who are worried about losing everything.

People worried about if they stay home from work, if they lose their jobs or if they lose their homes. There's just so much of a sense in which panic wants to come in and kick down the doors of our hearts and our minds and take over.

[5 : 03] And so what should we do? Well, I think James really speaks into that. I think what we'll see in this chapter is what it looks like for those of us who are Christians to be a people of faith in a time of fear.

That's our opportunity. But to do that, we're gonna have to actually address what is faith and some misconceptions about faith. So we're gonna dive in. We're gonna first look at James chapter one verses one through four.

It starts off like this. James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ to the 12 tribes in the dispersion. Greetings. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness and let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

This is, I think, addressing the first misconception which is that sometimes we can think that a life of faith means that everything is gonna be great, right? But here they are in a dispersion. They've been dispersed and they're facing, trials of many kinds.

And so I think the first thing we see here is that being a people of faith doesn't guarantee an easy life. Now I know this is probably not anybody listening to this. That's sarcasm if you can't feel that through the video.

[6 : 17] But it can be tempting for us to think that if you love God, go to church, try to be a good person, that nothing bad is gonna ever happen to you. In fact, think about it like the opposite way.

When something bad happens to you, how natural does it feel to instantaneously, really subconsciously, begin to think over the last day and the last week and the last month and where did I miss something?

Where did I do the wrong thing? Like how am I ending up in this bad situation? Those bad things make us think that we must have done something bad. And so what that exposes is kind of interesting.

What it shows is that what we really believe is in karma, not faith. Karma's getting what you deserve eventually. And so when something bad happens to you and you start assessing what bad things have I done, really it's an indication that you think this is all based on you.

That if you do good, you get good. If you do bad, you get bad. Faith is very different. Faith is trusting that God is good no matter what the situations are. So the first little gift we can get through this tough season is kind of like looking in the gas tank.

[7 : 24] I don't know if you've ever accidentally put diesel in a gas tank. It's a bad thing. Bad things happen. And I think this is kind of what that feels like.

It's like looking in the gas tank of our soul and finding out did we accidentally put karma in there instead of faith? Is that what we've done? Karma is gonna kill the engine.

It's gonna be smoking and sputtering and then just death. It'll cause us to be unable to process life when bad things happen to good people like us. That's what karma will do where faith on the other hand meant it will carry you through nightmare after nightmare after nightmare.

And so this is the first thing we see. Next, sometimes it can feel like faith is just sort of like letting, you know, quote, Jesus take the wheel. You know, there's not really anything we can do. It's a pretty passive thing on our part. It's a hands-off experience. And I think what we see here is that actually being a people of faith means faith-fueled choices. It means making faith-fueled choices.

[8 : 26] James recognizes this is an out-of-control situation. You are dispersed. You're spread out. There's all kinds of things that are not in your control. But he starts off by saying, hey, here's some things you can do.

And he gives them three distinct things, distinct choices they can make that we can make as well. The first one is that we can choose to count it all joy when you face various trials. That's a choice. It sounds a little sadistic, but it's not. There is a kind of joy that comes when you are suffering, but you're suffering while realizing that this suffering is making you better. It's not too dissimilar from getting on a healthy eating plan or going to the gym for the first time after a long time. There's a sense of soreness. Your body's craving sugar. And yet, in the middle of that, there's like a bounce in your step because you realize this is making you better. And so, that's kind of what James is getting at here. He's helping us get some perspective. Man, there is, these various trials are painful and hard, but at the end of the day, they can make you better.

[9 : 33] How does it do that? Well, the first thing he says, it makes your faith better. You can remember in this season that a tested faith is a better faith. A tested faith is a better faith.

I know that might seem like a weird concept. Look, I lived in like the LA, like Orange County, California area for a while. Coming from here, North Carolina, where, you know, everybody either had a four-wheel drive vehicle when I was growing up or if you like me didn't have a four-wheel drive vehicle, it didn't stop you from taking that said two-wheel drive vehicle into the Croatan and trying to drive like a four-wheel drive vehicle.

I would find myself driving on the highway in Los Angeles and it was just incredible. Everybody seemed to own a \$100,000 plus SUV, but nobody would drive on the roads when it rained. It was just like this crazy experience. I mean, it's a travesty. I wanted to say to these people, look, you have this incredible vehicle. It could drive across Africa.

It could drive through rivers, but you'll never take it out in the rain. And it was a ridiculous thing, right? It is a ridiculous thing. You can agree with that. But with that in mind, how many of us have this amazing faith that can get us through anything, but we never kind of quote, put it in four-wheel drive?

[10 : 55] We never take it off road. We never see what it's got under the hood. And we live our lives in fear when the rain comes because we don't know what we've really been given.

when you get your faith tested, it's awesome actually because it gives you a chance to see this thing that you always had that you've probably never really taken advantage of.

But again, that's a choice that you and I actually have to make. We choose to count it joy and when we face trials, we can choose to remember that a tested faith is gonna be a better faith.

And then lastly, we can choose to let steadfastness have its full effect, James says. Let it have its full effect. And really, this is James saying, don't tap out.

Hang in there. Don't tap out. Don't get panicked. Don't fire steadfastness and replace them with fear or worry or anxiety.

[11 : 53] Just don't tap out. Just hang in there. Just hold the line. Just stay steadfast. Just hang in there. And just trust that God is good.

In fact, he addresses this in verses 12 through 18. He says that, you know, the man blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial. And he says that this man is not a man who begins to blame God for all of his problems.

He's a man who looks and says that every good gift comes from God. He focuses not on his temptations and on his trials, but on God's goodness. And it keeps him hanging in there.

And so don't tap out. Hang in there. But you hang in there by focusing on God's goodness. So James moves from these things that we can do, even if they're hard, to acknowledging that there are things that you and I just don't understand.

And I think this is helpful because, again, misconceptions around faith. Sometimes we misunderstand faith and we think that we just shouldn't address unknowns or we have to pretend

like, you know, if we're people of faith that we have it all figured out.

[12:56] You know, and we feel this, sometimes this temptation to like, you know, spin everything and say everything in a really positive way. And I don't think that's, I don't think that's actually true.

In fact, what James says here in James 1 verses 5 through 8, he says, if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach. And it will be given to him.

Let him ask in faith though, without doubting. For the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that's driven and tossed by the wind, for that person must not suppose he will receive anything from the Lord. He is a double-minded man and unstable in all his ways.

This is some harsh language here, but it's helpful for us to hear. What James is helping us see here is that faith actually, it leads us to pursuing wisdom through prayer.

If you don't know what to do, the answer's not pretend, it's pray. And right now, a lot of us don't know what to do. And so we're Googling lots of things, we're glued to social media, we're glued to cable news, we're seeking wisdom.

[13:59] Now, I'm not saying that all of that's bad, but the call would be that we don't let those things replace prayer. Prayer is just talking to God, but by talking to God, by praying, what we're doing is actually acknowledging that God alone is our hope.

And so that's what we're called to do. When we really need wisdom and we can't find it on earth, when everything you see feels like it disagrees with the last thing you saw and that nothing seems to make sense and you don't know what to do, man, we're supposed to go to God in prayer and say, God, actually you alone know everything.

You alone are in control. We put our ultimate hope in you. We don't fake it till we make it. That is not a biblical version of Christianity here. We take our real worries and our real fears and our real questions to a real God who really cares and who really acts on our behalf.

So why do we not do that? Why do we not pray? Why do we choose doubt and say, well, James says it's because you've forgotten this good God that you've come to. He calls us to remember this. He says, just remember that the God you're praying to is the God who loves to help. He loves to help. Let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach.

[15:15] And it will be given to him. This is a God who loves to help. And so the invitation to come to him in prayer is made so much better because we know that this God we're coming to is a good God who loves to help us.

We don't come with our heads down like Eeyore, sort of like expecting a beating or a mocking. Oh, why are you here talking to me? I thought you had a faith. No, no, no. We come to a God who loves us and who loves to help and he wants us to come to him.

We don't have to be quick to pretend we've got everything all figured out. We can be quick to pray, be totally convinced of God's goodness and his willingness to help us. Now, all this is pretty straightforward and positive.

And then, you know, we see something a little bit more disturbing in verses nine through 11. James says, Let the lowly brother boast in his exultation and the rich in his humiliation because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.

For the sun rises and with its scorching heat it withers the grass and his flowers fall and the beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

[16:25] Well, we've all taken a vote and we don't like that, right? That's probably how we feel about this. What on earth is this about boasting and humiliation? I mean, how on earth could this be worth boasting in?

Well, I think it's that kind of on earth piece about that that's really helpful because in hard seasons what we get is like these hard seasons expose the frailty of this world and they cause us to hope in eternity.

Hard seasons expose the frailty of this world and they cause us to hope in eternity. We are really a people who even if we don't recognize it and realize that we put our hope in things like the stock market and earthly leaders we just it's just a natural thing to do.

And that leads to two kinds of results and sort of James simplifies people in sort of two categories rich and poor. He says, well, kind of the haves the richer are people who are likely to put their hopes in temporary earthly situations.

Like it's going good but it's just temporary. And then the have nots are often given to a kind of despair that feels eternal when it's temporary. Does that make sense?

[17 : 38] So both of these groups of people the haves and the have nots by hoping in this world they are losing eternal perspective. So James says this actually these hard situations can be we can be thankful for them because what they do is they cause us to they expose the frailty of the world for what it is and they cause us to hope in eternity and we end up coming out of that being people who brag in really strange things.

The rich are he says they're heard bragging that God has helped them put their hope in eternity not in their wealth. And that's a heart that's a it's like that's a bizarre thing for people who are quote rich to do.

It's just it feels totally countercultural. And the poor are found to be confident people because they know that a better life awaits them.

So our perspectives on where we find hope and happiness are deepened in hard times because now we've had our comforts exposed and threatened. I know that doesn't feel like a good thing but it really is.

It's like finding out that your parachute that you love so much has a hole in it. It's like finding that out before you jump out of a plane. Right? It's sad that this parachute you love has a hole in it but at least you're not dead.

[18 : 52] It's a hard thing to rejoice in it but really it's worth rejoicing in. It's good to know that the world's promises and threats are not that they're empty in light of eternity.

It's good to know that the world's promises and the world's threats are empty in a light of eternity. It's good to know that before you head into eternity believing in those promises or threats. So the scorching heat as James says it here it shows that the truth is that it's never as good as the rich might be led to think it is and it's never as bad as the poor might be led to think it is.

Eternity puts everything in perspective but it's only in hard times that we're actually pushed to the place where we think about life beyond this life. So faith calls us to get our eyes off of our earthly situations and off of these sort of as a source of confidence or fear and to cause us to look at a better world that awaits us.

So we choose to live not by faith sorry to live by faith not by fear to take our doubts and our questions to a real God who really cares to recognize our ultimate hope is in eternity.

What about our day-to-day lives? Well let's jump into verse 22 through 25. Be doers of the word and not hearers only deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer he's like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.

[20 : 16] For if he looks at himself and goes away and once forgets what he was like but the one who looks into the perfect law the law of liberty and perseveres being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts he will be blessed in his doing.

I think this addresses another misconception about faith. Sometimes we can misunderstand faith as being something that is that sort of personal in a way that it doesn't apply to other people.

It's just my personal faith. It's my personal walk. It's my personal like that sort of language can sometimes make it feel like it really only has to do with us and God. And James he kind of finds a sledgehammer somewhere to beat this one to death and what he shows us here is that faith leads to personal change and corporate action.

Faith leads us not to just receive the word personally but to actually apply the word to do it. And he says it's like looking in a mirror and you know when you first go to the word it's like you're going there to look at it but what you realize is really it's a mirror looking back at you.

You thought you were gonna examine the word but actually what you find out is the word is examining you. That's what's happening here. And James says hey when you see yourself being examined don't walk away and forget what you look like.

[21 : 35] Actually let this painful image that you've just gotten let it change you. Apply it to yourself right? And so what kinds of changes are we talking about here? Well in verses 19 through 21 in verse 26 he says this he says know this my beloved brothers let every person be quick to hear be slow to speak be slow to anger the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls.

In verse 26 he says if anyone thinks he's religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart this person's religion is worthless. And talk about a challenging list of changes there.

This is helping us see that faith leads us to watch our conduct and our speech. To watch our conduct and our speech these are personal changes that faith results in.

Right now we've all rightly been told to wash our hands a lot and to not touch our face and I'm right now in this moment self-aware that I've probably touched my face on this video now all of you have seen it.

So I apologize for that. It's hard to do right? It's hard to be aware of something that you're not really normally aware of. There's a paying attention to ourselves that we're being called to in this season that's a unique thing.

[22 : 57] It's unique in that we are having to watch where we put our hands we're having to watch what we do with our hands. This is a unique situation to be in but I think it really helps us understand this passage actually because in the same way James says that we should be really uniquely watching what comes out of our mouth what we say and you know your words they seem small and they seem innocent like touching your face seems kind of small and innocent but what James says here is actually it's extremely dangerous what comes out of your mouth is extremely dangerous we should be slow to speak we should be slow to anger we should be quick to hear those are as hard to apply as don't touch your face right it's just way easier for us to be quick to speak to be quick to be angry to be slow to hear I mean that's what's normal right and so James says actually no apply your faith in this way and really what he's calling us to do is to push back darkness that's inside of our own hearts and souls he's saying hey this is going to be hard for you to do but actually you need to do this this is what living a life of faith looks like it looks like resisting the temptation to be quick to anger and quick to speak in your own opinions and being quicker to listen and being slower to get angry and being slower to speak but then

James gets even more explicit about how to put our faith into action and this one is more difficult and more costly he says in verse 27 religion that is pure and undefiled before God the father is this visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world I think the last thing we see here is that faith leads us to extend kindness to the vulnerable faith leads us to extend kindness to the vulnerable in their day widows and orphans they were the most vulnerable they were extremely vulnerable and James says hey if you're going to be a person of faith if you're going to be a follower of Jesus don't live in different lives of selfishness enter into the affliction of the vulnerable visit them in their affliction we are right now to be mindful of those who are vulnerable and afflicted we are not just to think well I'm glad we don't have it I'm glad it's only over there right now or what that's the wrong way to think we're to be mindful to be mourning for those who have been afflicted with this virus to be mindful of those who are susceptible to it who are terrified of getting it we're to find ways to enter into their affliction and to be a blessing and you know as a church right now we're making a passive choice not to meet together in an attempt to be a blessing to those people but make no mistake there will be on the other side of this there will be an invitation to join in the affliction in more overt ways that's what faith looks like getting in the mess and helping how do we know that we know it from watching

Jesus and that's the last thing I want to just help us see is that really we do all of this by remembering what Jesus has done for us a lot of this sounds so overwhelming until you remember Jesus who saw our sickness and our sin he knew that coming to us wouldn't mean the possibility of death it would mean the inevitability of death he literally was born to die he willingly chose to come and suffer and to die to set us free not just from a virus but from sin and death not from a virus that wasn't our fault but from sin that was our fault he came to set us free from this eternally we didn't have hope in a cure there was no doctor that could help science had nothing to offer our terminal condition but Jesus came and he did the unthinkable he used his own body and his own blood as the means for our healing and this is a good moment for us to be reminded of how Jesus loves us and you might be thinking what on earth does this have to do with the coronavirus everything remember what James says he says this kind of stuff helps in various trials so they had various trials this is just another kind of trial and it doesn't matter what kind of trial gets thrown at us God's love displayed in Jesus gives us confidence to face anything just as we look to close here let's look at Romans 8 31 through 32 and verses 35 what then shall we say to these things if God is for us who can be against us he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not along with him graciously give us all things who shall separate us from the love of God in Christ shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword Paul lists off all the things that they were terrified of if he was writing to us he would say shall!

tribulation or distress or coronavirus or he would list that in there shall this virus shall it overcome what God has done for us in Jesus is this somehow more than God can handle this God who loved us so much that he gave his own son is somehow in heaven going actually not my problem actually I don't care actually figure this out for yourself no Paul says nothing that all of creation can break that relationship that's now been given to us because of what Jesus has done now we have God as our father a God who loves us so much he sent Jesus this God is for us and he is with us no matter what we face and so I'd love you to take some time now those who you're watching this with to thank Jesus together to pray for one another to pray too for those in our country and in this world who are really struggling and really suffering when you gather this week as community groups man take time to be with your brothers and your sisters think about how Jane started this letter off my brothers my sisters this is this reminder that we're part of a family of [29 : 06] God you might be doing great through all this but someone else around you someone else in your community group may be at their breaking point this might be just the straw that threatens to break the camel's back and you are not separate from them we are united together in Jesus and so look for ways to pray for each other and encourage each other and talk about how this is exposing the bad in your life and talk about how it's exposing the good in your heart and your life and we are so thankful for the chances we do have in a time like this to gather together God bless you guys please let us know if we can do anything to help you