

# What Does the Bible Say About . . .?

June 9, 2008

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## The Epistle of James - Part IV - and Feeding the 5,000

- I. Introduction
  - A. Announcements
    - 1. Open with prayer
    - 2. Any new people? If so, summarize need to bring paper, pen, and Bible (various versions helpful for comparison, but NRSV will be main one for reading, NASB for studying).
    - 3. Get list of names and how to contact (email preferred)
    - 4. 90 minutes on 4th Mondays at 7 p.m.
    - 5. Need volunteers to read passages listed in **bold**.
  - B. Does anyone have any questions/topics for us to consider for next time?
  
- II. Review / Introduction
  - A. Something that every teacher knows, is that when you teach you learn—perhaps even more than any of your students. While teaching in *James* last time, I saw something that I hadn't seen before. (Old sections C should be split into 2 sections)
    - 1. Because of that, I have made an adjustment in the outline of *James* that I gave you before, and I have a new one for you tonight.
    - 2. For me it was a pretty exciting discovery. I don't expect it to be as exciting for you, but after 15 years since I first prepared this outline, it was a change that was long overdue.
    - 3. It came just in time, though, because it also meant some changes for the section we will look at tonight.
  - B. I also received a question this week from someone who wasn't in our class, but I thought it was a good one and very worthwhile to discuss here too.
    - 1. The question was about Jesus' feeding of the 5,000. Someone wanted to know whether this was a literal event of Jesus creating the food or if it was more like the story of making "stone soup," in which everyone was fed because everyone shared. We will start with that question.
    - 2. Then we will pick up again in *James* with our sections C and C' from our revised outline.<sup>1</sup>
  
- III. Of all the miracles of Jesus, there are only two that are described in all four gospels - Jesus' resurrection and the feeding of the 5,000. (Matthew 14:15-21, 16:9; Mark 6:33-44, 8:19; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:1-14)

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.fumcwa.org/classes/wdbsa/WDBSA\\_2008-06-02\\_James-Outline\\_\(revised\\_2008\).pdf](http://www.fumcwa.org/classes/wdbsa/WDBSA_2008-06-02_James-Outline_(revised_2008).pdf)

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- A. That means that it was seen as extremely important by all the gospel writers. We will read two of them, then examine the question of whether this is about sharing, as in the "stone soup" story, or about something else.
1. **Matthew 14:15-21**, 16:9
  2. Mark 6:33-44, 8:19
  3. Luke 9:12-17
  4. **John 6:1-14**
- B. **Can someone tell us the story of the "stone soup?"**<sup>2</sup>
1. What do you see in the gospel accounts of Jesus feeding the 5,000 that is in common with the "stone soup" story?
  2. In John 6:9 we read that a small boy donates 5 small loaves of barley bread and 2 fish to Jesus to feed the gathered people. In the other gospels, the boy isn't mentioned, only the bread and fish are.
  3. That bit of sharing, admittedly, is similar to the tale of the "stone soup."
  4. Based on this foundation, some (including pastors) have called this a miracle of sharing. Let's see if that's true.
- C. Let's focus on John 6, since it has the added detail about the donation by the boy.
1. First of all, the boy is the only one who is mentioned giving anything.
    - a. In fact the other people clearly did not have anything for themselves or to add to a "potluck" meal. (Luke 9:12, Mark 6:36, Matthew 14:15, John 6:7).
    - b. The boy's generosity is to be commended, certainly, but John wants us to see something more important: the boy's faith.
  2. What was the response of the disciples when Jesus told them to feed the people? (they had no clue what to do. **John 6:7-9**, Mt. 14:17, Mrk 6:37, Lk 9:13)
  3. **How does their reaction compare to that of the little boy in John 6:9?** (We aren't told much about the boy, only that he offered what he had.)
  4. **But if we think about it too, how would the boy have known they needed the food?** (Probably from the disciples asking around. So after asking what people had with them, this is all they could find.)
  5. There sure wasn't much to share. **Why would the boy even bother to offer his tiny lunch to feed all the people?**

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<sup>2</sup>A Grimm Brothers tale about starving men who have no food and put a pot of water on a campfire to boil. They put in a selected stone and tells curious passersby he is making stone soup. Intrigued, the people each want to add something to it. Each goes home and gets something for the soup. In the end, all share a delicious "stone" soup.

<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stone\\_soup](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stone_soup)>

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6. The boy simply had a child's faith. He trusted Jesus to do much with very little. In other words, while the disciples' faith in Jesus was lacking, but the boy demonstrated faith that Jesus could provide for all.
- D. In this way, this is very much like the first miracle in the gospel of John: turning water into wine (John 2:1-11)
1. There Jesus' mother, Mary, showed great faith in him and simply told the stewards to do whatever Jesus told them. He did much with little, in fact more than enough. (It wasn't just good wine, but the best wine.)
  2. It's also like the miraculous healing of the daughter of the Syrophenician woman (Matthew 15:21-28).
  3. She showed great faith in Jesus when she indicated he could do much with very little (i.e., the crumbs were enough for the puppy just like his tiniest bit of "power" would be enough, indeed more than enough, to heal her daughter.)
  4. There are many other examples, but let this be enough for now. Back to the feeding of the 5,000:
- E. Notice that after the meal, there were many baskets full of leftovers. Jesus hadn't just done "enough" this time either, but way more than enough.
1. This is part of the message, part of why this event was so important to take notice of.
  2. Jesus could provide food far more abundantly than anyone seemed to need.
  3. Of course, Jesus didn't come to earth to merely feed us bread and fish for our physical bodies, but to be that spiritual "food" for our souls. This miracle is in fact a physical sign that points us to the spiritual message.
- F. Now we come to the most important part of this miracle. What Jesus did was instantly recognizable to first century Jews as being like Moses and the feeding of the Jews in the desert after leaving Egypt (Exodus 16:13-21).
1. First of all, notice where it took place. Matthew 14:15, Mark 6:35, Luke 9:12 say it was a "desolate place" (NASB), a "deserted place" in NRSV translation or "remote" in the NIV Bible.
  2. The meaning is clear; they were out in the wilderness. It was very much like when Moses led the Jews of more ancient times; they were in the desolate, deserted, remote wilderness then too.
- G. There are other unmistakable clues too.
1. In **Matthew 16:9** and **Mark 8:19**, Jesus asked the disciples to think about how many baskets were left. **How many were there?**
  2. Say the number "12" to a Jew, especially in the ancient world, and it would instantly be understood as referring to the 12 tribes of Israel.
  3. When Moses led them out of Egypt, he led the 12 tribes. When Jesus fed the 5,000 the leftovers filled 12 baskets.

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4. Jesus wanted the disciples to understand that he not only had enough to feed the whole crowd, but for all the 12 tribes, all of Israel (and of course, we now know, for all the world.)
- H. The Gospel of John doesn't mention that they were in the wilderness, but gets our attention in another way. He tells us that Jesus sat down on a mountain (John 6:3).
  1. This is written down not just for descriptive purposes. **Where did Moses receive the 10 Commandments?** (On a mountain-in the wilderness. Deuteronomy 5:1-22) Once again the gospel reminds the reader about Moses so we will see the parallels with Jesus.
  2. The very next verse (John 6:4) mentions it was near the time of the Passover. **What does that have to do with anything?** Think of Moses again. The first Passover was initiated through Moses just before the people were freed from Egypt. (Exodus 12:1-13, etc.)
- I. Jesus is clearly being compared to Moses (wilderness, mountain, Passover, feeding the people, 12 baskets/tribes), and for a very good reason.
  1. God spoke to Moses, giving him a very important prophecy: **Deuteronomy 18:17-19**, ("I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people . . .")
  2. The book of Deuteronomy ends with the death of Moses and another critically important statement: **Deuteronomy 34:10-12** (since the time of Moses no prophet like him has come along; no one has shown the signs and wonders and power that Moses had.)
  3. With Jesus that all changed. With his other miracles and very clearly in the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus was showing the same kinds of signs and wonders and power as had Moses.
- J. Not only that, but Jesus exceeded Moses.
  1. Moses went up on the mountain to RECEIVE the 10 Commandments. **But what did Jesus do when he was on the mountain?** (John 6:3)
  2. In the Jewish culture, that's the position of a teacher, not the one who is receiving instructions. He told the disciples what to do.
  3. He was not the one being told (as Moses was).
  4. Moses was instructed by God just as the disciples were now instructed by Jesus.
- K. And when Moses told the people about the "manna," he told them God was providing it.
  1. **But in the feeding of the 5,000, who was it that provided the food?** (John 6:11, etc.)
  2. It was Jesus himself who broke the bread, gave thanks, and passed it to the others. He was doing then, what God had done in the time of Moses.
- L. There's more. **In Moses' time how much bread (manna) was there? (Exodus 16:18-21;** enough for the day).
  1. But when Jesus fed the people there were 12 baskets full of leftovers.
  2. There was not only enough, there was way more than enough.

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- M. This is the central meaning of the feeding of the 5,000: Jesus is the one God meant who would be “like Moses,” but Jesus was also greater than Moses.
1. In fact Jesus was to the disciples and the people as God was to Moses and the earlier people.
  2. The conclusion Jesus wanted the disciples to see, and the gospel writers want us to see, is that Jesus is not just a prophet, but more than a prophet.
  3. In Jesus, we are to see God in human flesh come to dwell among us.
  4. That is why this passage can’t be reduced to a simple “stone soup” parable about sharing.
  5. It must be taken for the powerful historical event that it actually was, so we can understand what the disciples only understood after Jesus’ resurrection: God the Father and Jesus the Son are one and the same God.
- IV. Let’s catch our breaths now and get ready to switch gears and return to the Epistle of James.
- A. Now that we (hopefully!) have passed the first test in *James* (sections B and B’ from last time), we are ready to move on to the next one: the “test of our attitude toward God,” especially in contrast to our attitude about ourselves. In other words, “do we love God or do we love ourselves?”
1. Let’s read about them both in their parallel passages, and again you may read from the handout or your own Bible (but open to *James* either way).
  2. **James 1:13-18** (Test of Attitude Toward God, part 1)
  3. **James 4:13-17** (Test of Attitude Toward God, part 2)
- B. James 1:12 and James 1:13 both refer to temptation, but in verse 13 there is a transition to a new topic.
1. Every time *James* starts a new topic we find some reference to the tongue—to our speech. After all, since control of our tongues is the main subject of the whole epistle, that’s what we should expect to find.
  2. Here we are cautioned about what we say about God, especially what we say about God and temptation.
  3. **In the James 1 passage, what is the attitude towards God we are warned against? (Blaming God when we give in to temptation.)**
  4. **In order to be able to say God tempted us to do wrong, what must we believe about the character of God? (God is tricking us, wants us to fail, lies to us, etc.)**
  5. **What would motivate us to say that?**
    - a. When people do wrong, often the first impulse is to find someone else to blame. It’s a way we can find an excuse for ourselves.
    - b. To say we are tempted by God is the ultimate excuse. It seems to let us off the hook.
    - c. It’s a way of saying, “I’m not bad; God made me do it. (See Adam & Eve’s excuses in Genesis 3:8-13)

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- C. As described in the James 1 passage, having such a wrong attitude toward God leads to a downwardly spiraling chain of events.
1. **Where does temptation start?** (James 1:14. With us; our desire) Ahh, it's not God's fault. There goes that excuse! So perhaps we need to adjust our attitude toward ourselves too.
  2. **What is the whole chain of temptation described here?** (Desire leads to sin leads to death)
  3. Sometimes people think that the thought or desire is itself sin. **But is that what this scripture says?** (It can lead to sin, depending on what we do with it.)
  4. Our thoughts do, however, reveal the sin nature that is within us, as Jesus often pointed out (e.g., Matthew 15:10-20 >19).
  5. We each have our own thoughts we're glad no one else can read, and we struggle with them. But struggling with them—and against them—is the key. We can begin to sort of get comfortable with them . . . or we can **push** them away. One way leads to sin and death; the other to a consistent faith and righteousness.
- D. Notice the comparison between temptation's work inside us and the outward example of a physical life. (v. 15: Conception—Birth—growth—death)
1. **What does this picture tell us about the process from temptation to death?** (Gradual. Takes time.)
  2. Desire is *conceived*. Just like in life, that's when things begin.
    - a. **What's going on with us and our temptation at this point?** (Making plans, rationalizing, positioning ourselves)
    - b. **What can be done about the temptation during this time?** **1<sup>st</sup> Cor 10:13; 1<sup>st</sup> Tim 6:11; 2<sup>nd</sup> Tim 2:22** (NRSV has "shun." Others have "flee"—better translation)
  3. Then it *gives birth* to sin.
    - a. **What has happened with our temptation at this stage?** (We have acted on it. What we once just thought about, we have now done.)
    - b. **Is there anything that can be done after the sin has actually been committed?** **1<sup>st</sup> John 1:8-9**
  4. When it is fully grown the result is *death*.
    - a. **Everyone dies, so what does this mean?** (Spiritual death.)
    - b. **Is there any hope left at this point?** **Col. 2:13; Eph. 2:1-6, esp. 1, 4**
- E. All of this grows from our attitude toward God. Let's see what James 1 says about God.
1. **What does God not give?** (James 1:13; temptation) **What does God give instead?** (v. 17; every good and perfect gift)
  2. We already saw what our own desire/temptation give birth to (v.15, sin and death), **but what does God give birth to?** (v. 18, us as first fruits of God's Kingdom)

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3. **What does this tell us about God’s goal for us? Is God trying to get us to fail or to succeed?** (v.18) God does not tempt us because God does not want us to fail.
  - a. God wants us to be the “first fruit”—prime crop—of Kingdom of God.
  - b. It is God’s great desire that we stand firm against all temptations, that our faith is strong and consistent and true.
4. Sadly, though, we can often change with the wind. Today we want this; tomorrow something else.
  - a. No wonder we get caught up in temptations.
  - b. But is God like that, changing with a mood or whim? (Like Roman gods)
5. To answer that question, we are being given another illustration here—this time of light and shadow.
  - a. God is called the “Father of Lights” and v. 17 says there is “no variation.” **What is that telling us about the “light?”** (It never changes.)
  - b. In other words, God isn’t one way today and another tomorrow.
  - c. It’s as scripture says in Malachi 3:6, God does not change. And Hebrews 13:8 adds, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.”
6. Not only does God not change, there is nothing that can **cause** God to be changed.
  - a. The illustration in v. 17 mentions a variation or “shadow.” **What does a shadow do to light?** (Dims or changes it)
  - b. But *James* is telling us that nothing else can cause the light to change; there is no “shadow” that can dim it or in any way affect it.
  - c. What it is saying is this: There’s not even a “shadow” of change in God. So what God said thousands of years ago can still be trusted today.
  - d. We may change, but God does not.
7. **So when it comes to matters of temptation and sin, what can we say about God?**
  - a. **God does not tempt anyone to sin.** God wants us to succeed over temptation.
  - b. **What God gives is good and perfect**, because God is good and perfect.
  - c. **God will never change.** There is no corruption in the “light,” because there is no corruption in God.
8. If we have a right attitude toward God (and about ourselves), when temptation comes, we will **say** what is true—God does not tempt me; God wants me to succeed!—and we will have control of our tongues, and a **consistent faith**.

V. The passage in James 1 has been about what we sometimes wrongly say about God. We were admonished to not blame God for what is our own doing. The parallel passage in James 4 turns that on its head and tells us not to credit ourselves for what God is doing.

## A. **James 4:13-17**

1. Once again we begin with control of our tongues: “Come now, you who **say** today or tomorrow we will [do one thing or another].”

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2. What are some ways we commonly make plans without God?
  3. What is the attitude about God (i.e., in relation to ourselves) that is implicit here? (God is not in control. We are in control.)
    - a. Doesn't that sound a lot like the kind of advice we hear all the time?
    - b. "Take charge of your life."
    - c. "If you want something to happen, make it happen."
    - d. There's something to be said for taking initiative—but **not** without God.
  4. What this passage warns against is thinking that what we say matters more than what God says. And that is just not so, is it?
- B. It sounds pretty radical in our culture to say that we shouldn't make plans—even for ordinary mundane things—apart from God, but this passage in *James* is not the only one that says so.
1. **Matthew 6:9-10** (your will be done . . .) It's in the most basic prayer that Jesus taught us: "your will be done;" "**your** will be done."
  2. **Mark 3:31-35** ("whoever does God's will . . .")
  3. **1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:1-2** ("live . . . for the will of God.")
  4. **Galatians 2:20** (my favorite) perhaps the most radical of all ("I no longer live..")
- C. A consistent faith leads to an ever-growing desire in us to do the will of God—in everything that we do.
1. As that faith grows deeper and stronger, more and more we will want to know that what we do is God's will and not simply our own plans.
  2. **How do we do that?** (Discussion. e.g., begin/end day with prayer for God's will to be done in our lives.)
- D. One of the good things, I think, that the American soldiers in Iraq have picked up and are bringing home with them is a commonly used Arabic phrase, "*In sh'allah*." It means simply, "If God wills it."
1. My parents and grandparents used to say something similar, "Lord willing and the creek don't rise!"
  2. We make our plans and sometimes we ask God to endorse them, to make them work out the way we want. But that's backwards.
  3. When we control our tongues and have a consistent faith, we begin by seeking to discover God's plans.
  4. Then, if the Lord is willing—*in sh'allah*—we will do what God has shown us.

## VI. Summary

- A. Have we answered today's questions satisfactorily? Are there still questions on this topic we need to discuss more? What questions for next time?
- B. Next meeting: Monday, June 30, 2008. 7:00 p.m.
- C. Closing prayer
- D. **Archives of class notes can be found online at: [www.fumcwa.org/classes/wdbsa](http://www.fumcwa.org/classes/wdbsa)**