

## **Be Gracious to Me**

**Sermon Text:** Psalm 41

**Study Texts:** James 1:2-12, 26-27

**Sermon Recap:** The main idea of this week's sermon is: The blessed rely on the grace of the everlasting LORD. Take time before your growth group to review the key points you noted from today's sermon.

**Sermon Connection:** In this week's sermon we have looked at Psalm 41, the close of the first book of the Psalter. In this Psalm, we see two themes emerge: 1) Care for the poor and the lowly, and 2) God's faithfulness to His people in the midst of suffering. We can, at times, take these things separately. We care for the poor and lowly when things are right with us, or when things are easy. When we, ourselves, are facing hardship and suffering, caring for others tends not to be in our minds. And yet, the Psalmist holds these two things together, and this is also what we find in the first chapter of the Letter of James. As Christians endure hardships and sufferings of various kinds, we may be sure that God is in control, that He has a purpose in the hardship for our good and maturity. At the same time, we also note that James says true religion is found in hearing and treasuring the Word of Christ while also doing it; living obediently and caring to the lowly.

### **Lesson Plan**

**Lesson Goal:** To see how trusting in God frees us to do good to others even while we experience hardship and difficulty

#### **Lesson Points:**

**Point 1: A Faith that Sustains** (vv. 2-12)

**Point 2: A Faith that Acts** (vv. 26-27)

**The Context:** James is a letter to the suffering Christians in the Jerusalem church. It is important to keep in mind that James' letter is heavily influenced by Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7; Lk ). There are heavy overtones of Jesus' sermon throughout James' letter, and it serves as the hermeneutical key to the letter.

### **Point 1 - A Faith that Sustains** (vv. 2-12)

- In vv. 2-3, James calls Christians to view hardship and trials with a particular perspective. What is this perspective?
- In v. 3, the ESV states “...*the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.*” Other translations read, “...*the testing of your faith works/produces (patient) endurance.*” Considering these things, how do trials make us more like God according to James?
- How does a Christian perspective on hardship and suffering contradict a worldly perspective of the same? See also 2 Cor. 4:7-18.
- Verses 5-8 highlight wisdom; particularly our need for wisdom. What does the *context* of this passage reveal about James’ mention of wisdom here?
- In vv. 9-11, James turns his attention to the poor and the wealthy. What is the connection between worldly wealth and enduring hardship and trials?
- What does v. 12 reveal about how the gospel sustains the church in the midst of trials? How does this verse shed light on v. 2?

### **Point 2 - A Faith that Acts** (vv. 26-27)

- James devotes much of his letter to developing a Christian hope amidst trials and sufferings. In v. 26 he turns his attention to how the church is to live in the midst of these trials.
- Why does James highlight our speech in v. 26? What connection does this have with enduring trials with God’s wisdom and joy? See also Mt. 12:34; Lk. 6:45.
- Verse 27 highlights a very practical act of religion. What does it mean to “*visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world*”?
- What are some practical ways our growth group can care for the most vulnerable among us?

### **The Big Picture - Living with Hope**

The gospel bids us to come and die to our worldly selves; to die to the stresses and strains of the world that control us, cause worry and anxiety, and which consume us. The gospel of Jesus Christ invites us to see that the hard, worldly struggles of our lives are actually gifts from our Father in Heaven, through which He brings about growth in righteousness, growth in holiness, steadfastness and maturity. We learn that our hardships are the means by which God causes us to know Him more, to love Him more, and to be more like Him. And as we grow in such an understanding, we see that we are free to love and care for others even while we may continue to endure hardship of our own.

### **Application Questions**

- How am I currently dealing with hardship and struggle in my life?
- How am I seeking God’s wisdom in the midst of hardship?
- How might God be using a situation in my life to increase my faith and maturity?
- How can I care for the widow and the orphan?