

HIGHLANDS CHURCH

Highlands Sunday Service (9:00am)

Full Transcript

Thomas Slager
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Duration: 90:03

Welcome and Church Announcements

- 4:54 Hey church, thanks for joining us this morning. We've got some incredible opportunities for you to love God, love people, and make disciples here, near, and far. Check out our equipping classes Sunday mornings at 9 a.m. These classes are designed to help you grow as a follower of Jesus, and they're taught by our pastors and elders. So next Sunday, we're going to learn about practical ways we can love and care for the elderly in our lives. And then in the remaining Sundays in March, we're going to be exploring spiritual gifts, how we can identify them, how we can use those gifts, and how we can glorify God through them. No registration is required for these classes, and they are held in the student building.
- 5:30 So come and learn with us. Truck Town is next weekend on Saturday, March 7th. It's our biggest community outreach of the year. So invite families in your neighborhood to join us at Highlands for a day full of awesome vehicles, games, characters to meet, a BMX bike stunt show that shares the Gospel, and so much more. The event is free, but everyone does need a ticket to enter, and You can get the tickets. Also, sign up to serve with us as we get the opportunity to welcome people to our campus, and we're going to put the love of Jesus Christ on display. Guys, don't miss our men's retreat at the Lost Canyon Camp in Williams, Arizona, happening April 24th through the 26th.
- 6:09 It's going to be a weekend packed with fun, connection, and encouragement as we challenge each other to elevate our faith, strengthen our relationships, and live out our purpose by following the example of Jesus. There'll be plenty of free time, too. To enjoy paintball, golfing, the climbing wall, hiking, exploring Williams, or really just enjoying the beauty of the northern Arizona woods. It's the perfect chance to recharge, build friendships, and grow stronger together. If you want to learn more about all the things going on here at Highlands, head to our website at highlandschurch.org or check out our smartphone app. And if this is your first time with us in person today, stop by Info Central in the lobby.

Highlands Church Mission and Connection

- 6:47 We'd love to meet you. See you this morning. Go ahead and stand to your feet. It's a new month, and I'm so excited because that means it's almost Easter. We're celebrating now more than ever that Jesus is in charge and he's alive. Lift your voice with us this morning. You can grab a seat this morning.
- 11:46 Good morning. Welcome to Highlands. If this is your first time, I want to say welcome to you, whether you're in person or online. We're so happy you're sharing your Sunday morning with us. We have a couple different ways that you can get connected to Highlands. You can text the word Highlands to 94000 or if you're a little more old school, you can take that connect card in front of you and fill that out and hand it to Info Central in our lobby. Or if you like a little face to face interaction, you can just go directly back to Info Central at the end of the service. We have friendly, knowledgeable people at that desk that can talk to you about how you can best connect with Highlands.

12:32 Our mission here at Highlands is pretty simple. Love God, love people, make disciples. And according to Acts 1-8, we can do that by being Jesus' witnesses here, near, and far. Let's talk about here and near. We have Truck Town happening next Saturday. How amazing is that? We're going to have so many people on this campus. It's the largest community outreach event that we do. It's going to be fun. It's family friendly. It's a great opportunity to welcome those who don't have a home church or who are unchurched. Introduce them to Highlands. Maybe invite them to service or to Easter. And this is where we need you. Now, I'm your global outreach minister, so that means that I'm at Sky Harbor International Airport now and then.

Global Outreach and International Ministry Efforts

- 13:18 And I don't know if you've been there recently, but they have signs that say, Friendliest Airport in America. Now, I did some digging. I found out that they branded themselves that. So I don't know how accurate that rating is, but as I thought about it, I thought, this is true of Highlands. I think we are the friendliest church in America, or at least Arizona.
- 13:42 And so I want you on campus next Saturday so that people see your smile. They shake your hand. They see the love of Jesus displayed in you. So would you consider attending Truck Town, serving with Truck Town? You can do that by going online or you can do that back at Info Central as well. That's the here and near. Let's talk about far. Do you know that in the last several months, we have had Highlands representatives in four different countries on three different continents? We have a team in Kenya right now serving at Gem Foundation, which is a special needs orphanage there. They are loving on kids. They are supporting the staff people. Pray for them this week, will you?
- 14:25 They have a long week ahead of them. Todd Holloway, our worship pastor, a few months ago just got back from Peru. He was there with a team of worship leaders. They partnered with Kids Alive that works with children who have been abused or trafficked in that area, and they are providing a safe place for them. Todd and that team brought, I don't know how many, let's just say 100 ukuleles. They brought a bunch of ukuleles down there. They taught these kids music, and I thought, this is so beautiful because music transcends language barriers. It connects people to people. It connects our hearts to God's heart. So here they are just bringing light into a very dark place.

Personal Spiritual Transformation Through Service

- 15:08 Myself and our outreach intern, Brielle Hagman, we just got back from Thailand last Sunday night. We were checking out a ministry there, the Tamar Center. They work in Pattaya, which is the largest red light district in the world. And we were doing outreach on one of the most infamous streets in that area called Soy 6. And there's just, on the street, there's just bar after bar after bar after bar. 10 to 20 girls in each bar. Probably about a thousand girls being exploited just on that one street. Right in the middle of there, Tamar has a center. It goes bar, bar, bar, bar, Tamar Center, bar, bar, bar, bar, bar. At that center, girls can come.

15:48 It's a safe place. They can learn English. It's free English classes. And when they come to English class, they hear about the other Tamar Center that's not on that street, where if they want to exit that life, they can go there. They have a safe place to stay. They receive counseling. They hear about Jesus. They receive Job skills. We are so excited, again, about seeing light in a dark place. Brielle and I are just like Todd. We're praying and thinking about what our next steps are in Peru and Thailand. Now, I'm going to bring up Matt Rasner because Matt just got back from Kenya.

Upcoming Mission Trips and Service Opportunities

16:25 Ancient Promise International is a nonprofit started by Robbie Harrington, who's a member of Highlands Church. Her and her husband founded this nonprofit that trains pastors and leaders. Come closer, Matt. That's right. They equip leaders with Bible study tools and training, and they asked Highlands to come along and partner with them. And so Matt and Pastor Joe and Franco went down to do some Bible training with some of these pastors. So, Matt, tell us a little bit about what you and Pastor Joe were doing there in Kenya. Yeah. That way, if you get too long, I just do this. OK. I asked her how long I have. So, yeah, we went to Kenya and we taught the church leaders a lot about the Old Testament, how it points to Christ and a lot of application.

Prayer for National and Global Concerns

17:21 And it really gave them a new hunger for studying the Old Testament and diving in and teaching all of the people in the communities there. I really want to know, what did this trip do for you? How did it impact your spiritual growth, your walk with the Lord? What did you see God doing there in the people, but also in you? Yeah, for me personally, you think I'm going to teach the Word of God and God really had something different in store for me. Of course, teaching the Word of God was amazing and just a great opportunity. But really what it showed me was it took a couple of days to unwind my way of thinking and how we think here.

Authentic Worship and Knowing God Personally

18:07 And I didn't know really if it was real, like, real life.. And ultimately, the second or third day, the Lord had just stripped me down to really just my heart. Everything was stripped away from me. And these people, the love that they had, the things that they didn't have and the gratitude that they have and everything. It was just I was stripped down to a heart. And it was just a heart and a heart just loving each other. And I think that was the biggest takeaway for me, that it was almost a glimpse of heaven that I can love somebody that much and not think about all of the distractions and all of the things that we deal with here.

18:55 There's probably a lot more you can tell us, right? So at the end of service, we I don't know if you've noticed we have two big giant map murals out there. Say that five times fast. Map murals. It's hard. And we're going to do a little green dot ceremony. We're going to have Matt put a green dot in Kenya because all those green dots represent places that Highlands is being used by Jesus to make a difference in this world and Matt, you're going to be back there at that green dot ceremony. I would love for you to come up to Matt, ask him another question, ask him his favorite story of what happened. But life changing, right?

True Versus False Religion: An Introduction

19:29 Just to step out of our comfort zone, out of our country. And see what God's doing around the world. Thank you, Matt. Thanks for what you're doing.

Pure Speech: The Tongue Reveals the Heart

19:41 We have lots of other places we're going this year that I would love for you to consider joining us. We are going to the Dominican Republic at the end of May. We're going to join one more child and they work with families who are disadvantaged in that areas going through tough situations. And we're going to do ministry. We're going to do work projects. But mostly we're going to build relationships, letting these kids and these families know we see them because if they know that we see them, then they'll know that Jesus sees them as well. We're going to Romania in the summer. We're going to do an English camp. This really supports three pastors and their churches.

20:15 You know how trucks bring people onto our campus? Americans bring people to English camp. And so we are the draw just showing up to this trip. You can have an impact on the churches in Romania. We are doing an optical trip in Mexico, providing glasses for people who can't afford them, as well as sharing Jesus. We're going to Guatemala in September to do a theater camp with a school in Antigua that wants to end generational poverty in the name of Jesus. So we're going to be able to encourage kids, encourage teachers, but also see the amazing work that God's doing in Guatemala. We're doing a woman's conference in Mexico in the fall as well. We have a junior high mission trip, a high school mission trip, lots of ways for you to get involved.

21:00 I want you to really consider going on a trip. You don't have to have any special talents for any of these trips, except Romania. You have to be able to speak English. But other than that, no special abilities require just a yes. Just say yes to God and he will do the rest. You can find out about these trips on our website or I'll be back at InfoCentral after the Green Dot ceremony, you can talk to me about them as well.

Compassionate Care for the Vulnerable

21:27 I would like to take a minute right now. There's a lot going on in our country, especially recently. And we just want to pause here for a moment and just spend a moment in prayer. Just reminding ourselves that God is sovereign, that he is in control. We don't need to be fearful. We need to be faithful. So will you join me in prayer right now?

21:51 Heavenly Father, we never know what each day holds. But we know you hold each day. And with so much going on in our world, not just with us and not just with our country, so many countries that are dealing with unrest, war, poverty. God, we just come before you and we humbly bow down. We acknowledge that you are sovereign over all of it.

22:28 God, we pray for the leaders of our country, the countries in this world. Father, we pray that your will would be done. We would not put our faith in people. We would continue to put our faith in you. But we pray for these leaders that they would have discernment and wisdom.

Personal Purity in a Corrupted World

22:46 God, that your word and your will would be a strong voice in decisions that are being made. God, I pray for Highlands right here. I pray for us as we represent Jesus to this world. I pray that we would represent you well. That we would represent your love and compassion.

23:11 Truth. Lord, that we would humbly keep bringing before you our world, our leaders. And we would acknowledge when we see you at work, that it would strengthen our faith and that we would strengthen the faith of those around us as well.

23:33 In Jesus name. Amen. We're going to have the worship team come back up here in just a second. I was going to ask you to stand up and greet people around you. But when you do that, would you kind of scoot towards the middle so that those who are still coming in can find a seat a little easier? But go ahead. Shake somebody's hand right now and we'll get back to worship.

Communion: Remembering Christ's Sacrifice

24:51 Hey, just before we continue singing this morning, I want to encourage you with this thought. We're wrapping up the end of James chapter one that talks about what true religion looks like.

25:12 And man, it's with a heavy heart. I just encourage you with something that was going on in my heart this week. I get to put my little boy Wellesley to bed sometimes he's two and he sings with me. And sometimes I use that as a time to like, what are we singing this Sunday? I'll look at the planning center and I'll just go through the songs that we just got done in our preaching meeting again, just talking about twenty six and twenty seven, what does true religion look like? And I happen to think, man, there was a time when I get up here and I'd sing songs.

Call to Mirror Self-Examination and Obedience

- 25:48 And I would just spend a whole lot of bandwidth singing about God. And there's nothing there's nothing wrong with that. But it just got me thinking as I was sitting there holding well, singing with him. Like, man, I don't want to sing just facts. I don't want us to just sing he's holy and he set apart. I want us to know him and from a deep place in our heart. Let the praise come up singing what we know to be true. Does that make sense? So as we go. Into this set of songs, man, think that way. Don't just be singing words. Don't just be singing about him. Sing from a place of knowing because he knows you and he loves you and he enjoys when you sing about him.
- 26:38 So go and stand your feet if you haven't already. I think most of us are standing. Lift your voice with us. The song is 'Still
- 27:38 Your Name, Is the Greatest'. Your name. Stand. This is your. There's a joy in
- 33:56 The sorrow, my Redeemer.. Your stripes, my healer.. Still speaking, Your love still reaching, all praise.. King Jesus is
- 35:34 King. Still God, seeing Jesus.. Jesus, we thank you that we get to know you. Not just on the surface, not just information about you. But God, we get to know who you are. We get to walk and talk with you. We get to tell you what our deepest sorrows.
- 40:11 And our biggest triumphs. Or we get to lean on you when man, the world seems to just be falling apart. And God, I just thank you that you know me, that you know what's in my heart. God, you know, my fears, my anxieties. God, and you still love me.
- 40:39 Thank you for identifying with me. You came to Earth. You did ministry and ultimately. Just all concluded with immense suffering.
- 40:53 God, we thank you that it wasn't in vain. We thank you. that as we as we just started this morning, seeing it as a church that you're alive. God, we thank you.
- 41:07 What I pray that just as we move through the next moment, as Thomas opens your word, as we wrap up the first part of James or that we would just really evaluate our hearts. God, that you would check my motives, but I wouldn't just be doing things to look religious. But God, it would be from a motivation. Just to come from a deep seated love of knowing you and being known by you.
- 41:39 Lord, we thank you for Sundays. Thank you that we get to get to sing your praises. In your name we pray. Amen. Amen. You can go ahead and take a seat.
- 41:55 Amen. And what a beautiful time of worship that was together as a church. Amen. And thanks, guys, for leading us so well each and every week.. And maybe you got a touch excited right there as Todd prayed and thanked the Lord for our finishing of James chapter one this morning. I don't think that's how he meant it, but I am thankful to be wrapping up

42:19 If you are new with us, we've been walking through the book of James ever so slowly. I think what week are we on? Five hundred of James chapter one, I think is where we're at this morning. We're going to be looking at verses twenty six and twenty seven and twenty seven of James chapter one. And people have I've gotten mixed bag response from people when it comes to how slowly we're moving through the book of James. Many of you have appreciated it and many of you have been wrong. So it's been fun to go through nice and slowly. I once heard a preacher of God's word explain it like this. The more you dig into God's word, the more you find out.

42:57 It's like discovering beautiful diamonds or discovering beautiful rubies.. And the more you mind. realize there's more beauty and more depth behind each and every diamond or ruby that we mine. And that's kind of the approach that we've been taking to the book of James. James is an interesting letter. It's likely the oldest book, the oldest letter in the New Testament written by someone with incredibly close proximity to Jesus. James was Jesus's half brother. Even though James didn't believe in Christ while Christ walked this earth, he gives us a very interesting perspective of what it may have looked like to hear the things his brother taught and then also to lead the early church in Jerusalem.

43:41 When James writes to this early church in Jerusalem, the church has been scattered all over the earth. They've been dispersed from their homes due to immense persecution, likely by Emperor Nero. So we get interesting perspective from this man, James. Earliest letter in the New Testament, earliest church in the New Testament written by half brother. And Jesus, someone who knew Jesus very, very well. And I think if we want to know Jesus, it's probably good for us to spend time with people who knew Jesus well, which is one of the reasons we're walking through the book of James. Like I said this morning, we're in James chapter one, verses 26 and 27, talking about true and false religion.

44:25 True or false religion. I don't know about you. It's become increasingly difficult for me to true out in the world, especially going through Facebook. It seems like our Instagram or whatever social media that you're on, it seems like every other thing is some deep fake A .I. something where it's like, I don't think that's true. And then you look at the comments section and it's like everyone thinks this thing's A .I. What's actually true? That seemed too good to be true. Of course it's not. And we end up kind of figuring out, man, what's true, what's false. So to get us thinking true and false, I'm going to take us through a little exercise this morning, not physical exercise.

45:05 You're welcome. More of a mental cognitive exercise we can do together. I think I have six or seven true or false questions I'm going to put up on the screens this morning. I have been warned. I have not actually seen what these questions look like. I've told they're rather fun. So let's get that first question. What is the first true or false question we have up on the screen this morning? True or false?

45:33 A group of flamingos is called a flamboyance. Don't reveal the answer quite yet. Thank you, Brendan Anderson, for using A .I. to create all of these photos. So we still do not know what is true and false, even as we take this survey this morning. If you think

45:52 The flamboyance, if you think that's true, go ahead and raise your right hand nice and high.

45:58 Is that it? All right. True or false? Is it actually called the flamboyance? Is that true? Is that false? Give us the answer. That is true.

46:10 Fun facts with Thomas. Brian Fellow Safari Fellows right here this morning at Highlands Church. What about the next one? What's the next question? Our next true or false? True or false? An octopus has three hearts. If you think that's true, raise your right hand. Raise your right hand. Raise your right hand.

46:30 Or not. Is that true or is that That is true. That is true. That's another true one for you. What's the next one? True or false? This one's interesting. True or false? In Australia, it's illegal to take a selfie with a kangaroo without a wildlife permit.

46:56 True or false? Raise your right hand if you think this is true. Not if you would like this to be true. If you believe this is true. Is that true? Is that false? Is it This ruined your whole morning. What? Thanks, B.

47:20 That is a handsome fella. All right. What else? True or false? We got a few more of these. True or false? It's illegal to own just one guinea pig in Switzerland. You can own two. You can own three. You can own five. But it is illegal to own

47:42 True or false? Raise your right hand if you think this is true this morning. That is true. OK, great. I

47:55 Should have looked at these first. Note to self. All right. What's the next one? True or false?

48:05 In some parts of Alabama, it's illegal to wear a fake mustache in church. Really looking forward to the photo on this one.

48:18 Raise your right hand if you think it's illegal in some parts. Little caveat there. Some parts, not all parts. All right. Is that true or is that false?

48:32 That actually, that works. Wonderful. All right. One more. True or false? Canada is better at hockey than the USA.

48:51 There's one. The answer is not true. United States of America. That, of course, is false.

49:05 Greatest country. Wonderful. Double gold. Fantastic. Maybe sometimes it's easy to figure out what's true and what's false. Oftentimes it's becoming increasingly difficult

49:19 Especially as we look at James chapter one and trying to figure out, OK, what does true religion look like? What does it really look like for us to follow Christ in a way that's true, in a way that reflects our heart, not in a way that's lip service, not in a way that just talks the talk or a way that walks the walk. But what might true religion look like that comes from a true place of authentic faith and love in our heart? That's where he's going to go in verses 26 and 27. He's going to give us three examples of what true religion looks like for us today. Let me read verses 26 and 27.

49:54

James 1:26-27

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

50:19 Let's go to the Lord again in prayer. God, well, it's my voice that's been heard this morning. We recognize it's your word that's been spoken.

- 50:30 God, I pray today you would empower us to not be hearers only of your word, but we would hear your word and then we would respond in obedience. Go out into the world and actually do what your word says.
- 50:46 Father God, thank you for everyone you've brought into your church here this morning. Thank you to everyone you've brought, God, to your church scattered all over the world this morning. I pray that your name would be lifted high above everything else. Holy Spirit, today we pray that you would open our eyes to see, our ears to hear, our minds to know, our hearts to love. As we leave this place, open our mouths that we go out into the world and preach the good news of who Christ is and what he's done. And again, God, empower us for obedience, that we would glorify you in all things. God, especially in our church. In our hearts. God, everything we do in this place this morning is for your glory.
- 51:20 We ask also you use it for our good. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen. Amen. Just two verses this morning. I do want us to, we're going to flip to the left in a little bit here and get James's brother Jesus's take on the information that James is going to cover today. So if you preemptively want to flip left, we're going to be in Matthew a bit and Mark a little bit and Luke a little bit and in John a little bit. To get Jesus's take on the three marks of true religion that James mentions here. That is what you see in your outline.
- 51:56 Three signs of truth, three signs of externals, of something actually going on for real at a heart level inside of us. He begins in verse 26. If anyone thinks he is religious. Now, remember, last week we talked about hearing and doing. Be not hearers only. Be also doers. Don't just hear the word, but actually obey the word. This is what God has commanded his people since the beginning of time. Obedience, obedience, obedience. You can look at Jesus in Matthew chapter 28. He commissions his disciples, go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe.
- 52:38 Teaching them to obey. Not just set it in front of them so they can know and understand, but teach them to obey all that I have commanded them. This is what God expects from his people. This is what Jesus even expects from his friends. Jesus in John chapter 14 and John chapter 15. He says, you are my friends if you do what I say.
- 53:01 Friendship with the Lord looks like obedience to the Lord. That's where we were last week, hearing and doing. But now he's going to kind of continue on in that really is going to give us three examples. He gave us the illustration last week of looking into the mirror. Right. Mirrors have a way of exposing what we look like. But they also give us an idea of what we should look like. They reveal our flaws, but they also kind of reveal what ought to be. When we look in God's word, we saw last week God's word is like a mirror.
- 53:36 See ourselves the way we are right now. But we also ought to be. Now, James, he's going to give us a little bit of a internal test. He says, OK, you've looked in the mirror and you've seen who you are and you've seen how you've ought to be. James says, let me offer you three examples, three examples in areas of our life that we ought to look in the mirror and see what's really going on. Now, this is not for us to hold the mirror up for other people. Right, the goal of this morning is not to think through, man, so and so really needs to look in a mirror because she is not good at one, two or three.

54:18 Or I really wish so and so was here and definitely don't throw an elbow to your spouse this morning. That will not end well. The goal is for us to look in the mirror, to do some introspection, to check our own heart, to see the way we are, but also see the way that we're meant to be.

54:38 And he gives three areas, three marks, he uses this word religious, oftentimes the word religious gets a pretty negative connotation. Sometimes you'll even hear us say things like, man, Jesus isn't about religion. Jesus is about relationship. There's a few different ways we can use this word religion. We're going to stick with the word religion because that's what James uses here. And I don't think he uses religion in a sense of like negative connotation. Religious. Jesus uses the word religious sometimes to speak of those as those who were self-righteous. The religious folks, the self-righteous folks, Colossians chapter two talks about

55:20 Being self-made, man-made religion, so no real religion at all. Jesus also speaks of religion or the book of Acts speaks of religion or James speaks of religion right here as a system that defines a set of beliefs.

55:37 So for each and every one of us, we could say, yeah, I'm religious in a sense of man, I follow Jesus. And his certain system and set of beliefs govern the way that I live my life.

55:53 So religious here is I hear God's word and God's word governs my life. I do God's word. It's not a negative sense of religion here. James is just saying, okay, so let's say you hear God's word. You do God's word. You're a good doer. You're being obedient. That's wonderful. Let's take these three tests together. Three marks of true religion. Three marks of true faith. If anyone thinks he's religious and does not bridle his tongue, what a bummer. He goes right for it.

56:23

James 3:7-8

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

56:33 That would be false. That would be false religion. We're going to talk a lot more about the tongue in chapter three. Chapter three, verses seven and eight says this for every kind of beast and bird of reptile and sea creature can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It's a restless evil full of deadly poison. It almost seems like an impossibility we're being asked to do. He says, if you think you're a good doer, if you think you're religious, but you don't have the ability to control your tongue, if bridle your tongue. Now, I'm going to speak from a place that has no expertise whatsoever. I know nothing about horses.

57:21 I know nothing about riding them. I know nothing about them, period. They scare me. They freak me out.

57:29 But from what I've gathered about a bridled horse, bridle is the headgear that goes over the entire horse. And chapter three is going to talk about a bit. That's the thing that goes in the back of their mouth to actually control them. Even from guys I know who have horses, they're good horsemen and ladies who are even using the wrong words who are involved in riding horses and doing stuff with horses and all this stuff. Even though you bridle the horse, as much as you would like to say that you are in complete control of that horse, that is still a giant horse and still capable of doing some wild things.

58:07 So even us, there's this expectation of, man, we have to have some type of ability to bridle our tongue, some type of self-control when it comes to the way that we talk. May not be perfect control, have

58:25

Luke 6:43-45

For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

58:53 Luke, chapter six, verses forty three through forty five. This is Luke's account of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, the greatest sermon ever given.

59:03 Luke six, verse forty three begins like this. For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. This is pretty straightforward, right? An apple tree is an apple tree because it produces what apples.

59:26 A strawberry bush plant, a fig tree produces what figs. Good trees, good fruit, bad trees, bad fruit, what's on the inside ultimately makes its way to the outside, each tree is known by its fruit. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good. And the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil. Now, get this. This is worth underlining and highlighting. For out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaks.

60:04 Why does James go for the tongue? If you think you're religious but cannot bridle your tongue. Because the tongue tells the truth about what's really going on inside. Now, the tongue may not always say truthful things, but the tongue always reveals truthful things. We can lie, that is not truth. But that tells the truth about something going on in your heart.

60:34 I read a story this last week about a pastor who was down in Mexico doing some house projects, fixing things up, and they were putting a roof on this house and they were working tirelessly for days. For days, he was on the same roof with the same gentleman. And they're just hammering shingles into a roof day after day after day. And out of the corner of his eye, he keeps checking this guy from his church. He's just watching him.

61:00 Just watch him. He's sweating buckets, putting in all this effort, trying to put the roof on this house for this family, and this guy is just watching. Finally, after day three, this pastor asked this gentleman from his church, Hey, I've been working over here, hammering away, and you've just been staring at me. Can you let me know why you keep staring?

61:23 And this guy from his church said, Well, pastor, I want to see what comes out of your mouth. When you hit your thumb, I

61:35 Can see the externals. I can see what you're doing, but I want to see what's actually in there. When you stub your toe, what comes out? Oh, golly jeepers.

61:50 I mean, overflow overflow. When we bump, something spills out of us. What are the things that spill out of us? Our tongue, our speech tells the truth about what's really going on inside of our heart. It's a really good thing. It's if we think we're religious, if we think we're good doers, but we can't bridle our tongue, man, that might be problematic for us. Matthew chapter six, I'm going to flip to the left. You can join me there if you'd like.

62:22

Matthew 6:5-8

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

62:38 Maybe they're not true. Maybe we're trying to project something. Maybe we have a pride issue. Maybe we have identity issue. Maybe we have some type of ego inside of us.

62:52 Jesus instructing his disciples on how to pray. When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites. The hypocrites are oftentimes the self-righteous, bad kind of religious folks that Jesus has run ins with throughout the gospels. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners that they may be seen by others.

63:14 Man, you see these guys, these religious leaders, and it looks like they're doing it for the right reasons, but Jesus says, hey, I can see their heart.

63:25 Don't be fooled by what they say. comes out of their mouth. Truly, I say to you, they've received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your father who's in secret and your father who sees in secret will reward you.

63:40 And when you pray, don't heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. And these Gentile believers, they're praying and things are coming out of their mouth and the things that sound amazing. And you've heard some of these prayers before. These prayers where it seems like sometimes people and they're beautiful prayers and it's not our place to question someone's heart, but it's man, they I mean, they just prayed the whole Bible. That was a long time to pray. That was awesome.

64:14 I'm a Christian. That guy's like a super Christian. I know the Lord, but that lady really knows the Lord.

64:22 Again, it's not on us to hold a mirror up to other people. It's ourself. Even when it comes to our prayer life, the words that come out of our mouth. Why do those things

64:35 It reveals something. Are you praying the way you pray because you want people to think a certain thing about you when you're closing out your small group and someone says, hey, does anyone want to pray? And you're like, I want people to think something awesome about me, so I'm going to step up and do it. And that does not mean this week at small group, when the question is asked, would anyone like to close in prayer, you can't be the one.

- 64:58 But we've got to hold up the mirror and check ourself. What's really going on in my heart, the things that are coming out of my mouth, they tell the truth about me. The things might be truthful.
- 65:16 Total lies. They could be true, they could be false, but Our heart, James says, you think you're religious. Look in the mirror, check your heart out of the overflow of the mouth of the heart of the mouth speaks. If anyone thinks he's religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. This is the third time we've talked about deception in this passage. Earlier on in verse 16, we're commanded, don't be deceived, my brothers. By what? By the temptations. The temptations that exist out in the world.
- 65:55 Don't be deceived, don't take the bait, don't fall victim to the lures the devil and his demons continuously throw in front of us. Don't be deceived by what's going on in the world. Just last week in verse 22, we read, don't just be hearers of the word and not doers of the word, if we hear the word and don't obey the word. Now we're deceiving ourself.
- 66:22 We're deceiving ourself into thinking that we're actually in a pretty good spot. I did the thing. I came, I saw, I sat, I listened, I left. I did what I was supposed to do. I did my devotion. I listened. I understood. But if listening and understanding never makes its way into action, active obedience in our life, we're only deceiving ourself.
- 66:44 We're only deceiving ourself. And then he says here, man, don't think you're religious and not be able to bridle your tongue, because if that's the case, you're just deceiving your heart.
- 66:59 And that could be true of each and every one of these examples. If you can't bridle your tongue, you're deceiving your heart. If we're not showing practical compassion for the least of these, then we're deceiving our heart.
- 67:13 If we're not actually doing what God called us to, if we're not pursuing personal purity in our life, then we're actually just deceiving our heart. It could be true for each and every one of these. So the first Mark of true religion, pure speech that reflects a transformed heart.
- 67:34 Hey, thanks be to God, by the way, there's forgiveness when you stub your toe.
- 67:40 That when you finally do hit your hammer and that thing comes out of your mouth that still is there that you're trying to deal with, thanks be to God that he's still forgiving and loves and cares for you.
- 67:51 There's still no perfect people. Thanks be to God that his kindness leads us to repentance. mercies are new every single morning.
- 68:03 Does God require perfect tongue, perfect speech? No, but we ought to be growing in our faith and seeing progress.
- 68:11 The first Mark, pure speech that reflects a transformed heart. There's a second Mark of true religion, practical compassion for the least of these. If anyone thinks he's religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. It's really not having any real kind of impact or effect in your life. Verse 27. Religion that is pure and undefiled. Pure and undefiled before God the Father is this. He's going to give us two more things. The first, to visit orphans and widows in their

affliction. And the second, to keep oneself unstained from the world.

68:54 That is the audience we serve, by the way, before God the Father. That's the goal. We're not living our life for the gram. glory. We're praise of other people. We're not doing these things for the purpose of taking a selfie to post it on Instagram so everyone can know how pure hearted and awesome that we are. We do the things we do for the glory of God.

69:20 An audience of one. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father. That is the goal to live our life

69:31

Matthew 9:35-38

And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

69:52 And if compassion then compassion ought to also be the way of Christ's people. He's the light of the world. We are ought to reflect who he is. And what he did within the world that we live. Practical compassion for the least of these. Matthew, chapter nine, beginning in verse 35, says this. And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them.

70:30 Now, compassion is more than just feeling bad. my heart really goes out to him. Biblical compassion, the compassion of Christ is active compassion. It does something. Our heart goes out to people, but then our feet quickly follow. Our faith does.

70:53 Compassion is so much does something. And time and time again throughout the gospels, we see Jesus moved by compassion. His he responds. He responds by feeding them multiple times. He responds by teaching them. He responds by sitting with them. He responds by healing them. His compassion is active. He had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Man. If there was something that I could just snap my fingers and make myself more like Jesus, that would probably be one of them. To have the compassionate heart of Christ where I could see people the way Jesus sees them. Sheep without a shepherd, helpless, harassed. I don't know a whole lot about sheep either.

71:52 I do know they don't have much defense mechanism other than being kind of fluffy.

71:58 That's kind of it. A sheep without a shepherd is completely defenseless. can't really do much for itself.

72:11 I think this is why James uses this example, which is a practical example of orphans and widows.

72:22 Pure, undefiled religion. True religion is this to visit orphans and widows in their affliction. Now, I don't think this is super far off from how we would view orphans and widows today. I think there's a bit more available nowadays. Government welfare, government assistance and everything else, church assistance. For people who fit these kinds of categories of orphan and widow. But back in the day, we're talking about a system where there's no welfare. There's no government assistance. It's completely on the people

around them to take care of them. So if someone was an orphan, which doesn't just mean a parentless child in this culture, it would have been a fatherless child, someone who didn't have headship, didn't have someone over them, protecting them, providing for them.

73:05 They were oftentimes kidnapped, sold into slavery, or they were just kidnapped and used as a slave by whoever the kidnapper was.

73:15 They're defenseless. They're helpless. They can't provide for themselves. In this culture, similarly, a widow didn't have many rights. All the rights typically belonged to a husband. Land ownership belonged to a husband. Business So if a husband is removed from a situation, you're left with someone who's incredibly vulnerable and fits this category of least of these.

73:45 And here James says, hey, if we want to have a little true or false check, if we want to look in the mirror and see if our religion is actually true, it will reflect itself overflowing out of a heart into compassionate action for the people around us who fit this category of least of these.

74:06 I don't know about you. I don't have any directly in my circle. People people right around me who are orphans and widows. I am, however, a part of a church who does a lot to care for orphans and widows. Maybe you in your life, there's people in your life, there's widows that you can care for. Maybe God's giving you opportunity to care for them.

74:35 Maybe there's opportunity to step in to visit with them in their affliction. Maybe there's someone in your life who's recently been widowed. And their affliction, their trial looks like they're grieving the loss of a spouse. And that is an opportunity for us to have the compassionate heart of Christ to step in and care for people who are in grief, who are in loss.

75:02 True religion looks like compassionate care for the least of these. Thirdly, true religion looks like personal purity in a polluted world. That was a lot to say,

75:19 Religion that's pure and undefiled is to keep oneself unstained from the world. Man, some of these seem like impossibilities. Unstained from the world.

75:31 And it would be a lot easier if Jesus would just, the moment we get saved, we're like beamed up to heaven and it's done. Wouldn't that be easier? Then we could actually stay unstained from the world. Jesus actually prays against that. John chapter 17, he says, Father, I do not pray for them that you take them out of the world, but I pray that you keep them from the evil one.

75:53 Father, just as you sent me into the world, so too I am sending them into the world that they may be one just as you and I are one, that the world may see that they are one.

76:06 Yeah, it'd be great if Jesus would just remove us from the equation. Wouldn't be quite as impossible. Here's impossible. I have a five year old. Dress her in white, feed her spaghetti. It's impossible that she doesn't get spaghetti on her shirt. Hundred percent track record every time. Stained, stained, stained.

76:33 But again, thanks be to God that there's forgiveness and grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. To think that we're going to live a life totally unstained from everything around us, man, it's not going to happen. Romans chapter seven speaks to this experience in our life. The things I don't want to do with the things I

keep doing. Don't want to get stains in my life, but God, I keep getting stains in my life. The things I want to do, these are the very things I can't do. And then he raises this question. Who can save me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

- 77:07 Again, from our hearts, we turn to Christ and we receive his grace. We receive his mercy. Maybe part of this whole thing is a realization. Man, as I look into the mirror, I realize I'm still not perfect.
- 77:22 The religion I see, it still has not perfected me. Maybe as we look into this mirror, we see the way we are ought to be. And we still clearly see the person of Christ who loves us, who lived for us, who died for us, that we might be able to walk in newness of life.
- 77:43 And we're going to take communion in just a second. In John chapter 13, this whole communion account really starts all the way back in John chapter 13. Jesus is enjoying a meal with his disciples, and he bends down before this meal and begins to wash their feet. He And the Apostle Peter, of course, it's Peter. He says, whoa, Jesus, you're not washing my feet. I need to wash your feet.
- 78:11 Jesus tells Peter, Peter, if I don't wash your feet, you have no place with me. Peter responds, well, if you have to wash them, not just my feet, wash all of me. And Jesus tells him, you don't understand. You've already been cleaned, but your feet are a little dirty.
- 78:29 And the beauty of the Gospel is that there's cleaning found in Christ. Now, while you and I go through this life, while we won't remain completely unstained, we're going to get some dirt on our shirts. stains have some filth in our life yet again, time and time again. And we can come back before Christ and say, Jesus, forgive me.
- 78:53 Jesus, forgive me. And that's one of the things we get to do through communion. If you didn't receive communion, there should be a communion cup and a seat back in front of you. I'd invite you to grab one. And from there, if for some reason you can't find one in you can slip your hand up and someone from our communion team can get you a communion cup from there.
- 79:19 During that same meal, when Jesus washed his disciples feet, he took a piece of bread during that meal and he broke it. And he said, this is my body, which is broken for you. Friends, we do this in remembrance of him.
- 79:45 And the same way he took a cup, he said, this cup represents the new covenant. My blood poured out
- 80:05 Jesus, we're so thankful this morning that you love us in spite of us. Jesus, we're thankful it's by grace. We've been saved through faith, not by works, not of our own doing. So no one can boast. Your grace, your gift, God, you sent your son to live the life we can't live. To die the death we deserve to die, God, we know what it looks like to live a upright and pure life.
- 80:32 God, true religion, perfect religion would look like pure speech. God, thank you for forgiving us when our speech is not. God, true religion would look like practical compassion.
- 80:49 God, we dropped that ball time and time again. Help us follow through on that. But God, in the meantime, thank you again for forgiving us for lacking compassion. Would you give us your heart for the world around us?

- 81:02 God, true, perfect. Religion would look like personal purity, being completely unstained from the world. But God, we know time and time again living this life, our feet get dirty. God, thank you for washing them up.
- 81:19 God, we return now to musical worship. Would they not just be mere words, but would they be words sung out of the overflow of our heart, a true desire to worship you, to lay our crowns down at your feet, to bring you all the glory, all the honor, all the praise. God, we love you. We praise you. We thank you. In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Would you stand and join us as we close in one more song of worship? My Savior has
- 82:23 Well gone. Majesty. Amen. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord. The Book of First Peter says, so just as he is holy, we too must be holy in all our conduct. Friends, let's look in the mirror. Where are we at? What does our religion produce in our life? What does our faith in Christ produce in our life? Is it producing pure speech?
- 88:24 Is it producing practical compassion? Is it producing personal purity? And if it is, stay the course for the glory of God. If it's not, would the kindness of the Lord lead you to repentance this morning? Will we profess our faith in Christ and Christ alone, knowing that our good works do not save us, they're only a reflection of a good God who has. Amen. Our prayer team's down front and they'd love to pray with you, pray for you. This morning for the rest of you. Don't forget service isn't over till you love somebody. Love somebody well and then go out into the world and live on mission for the glory of Christ and Christ alone.
- 89:01 We love you. God bless you. Have a great week. Bye bye.