

Grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, be and abide with you always, now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen. You may be seated.

All right, I guess I was a little distracted by our scripture readings. If you paid any attention to them, these are challenging scripture passages to read. Let's start again with the Old Testament, with Numbers. We've got the children of Israel and what are they doing? Their favorite pastime: they're grumbling. They're grumbling as they are wont to do, and they're complaining about the fact that God is feeding them miraculously with this mana that comes every day and nourishes them and sustains them in the wilderness. They're complaining because they don't have meat. They're complaining because they want some variety in their lives. They don't want to eat the same thing over and over every day. After every day they want something different, so they want some meat. And so they start complaining and they go, "Oh, remember when we were in Egypt, we had fish and cucumbers and melons and all these delectable wonderful foods. Oh yeah, we were slaves and we had to work all the time and we had no freedom, but our bellies were full. And wasn't that a wonderful time?"

Yeah, I'd like to think that I would not be like the Israelites, but how many times does our belly really kind of control us? How many times do we grumble about our food or the lack of variety, or the lack of interesting things? Or remember when it was easier or better or who knows what? This is a common concern. The fact of the matter is this represents a larger concern. So often in our lives, and this is what James is talking about and really kind of what Jesus is talking about as well. So often in our lives we're concerned primarily and principally about our own well-being. We're more interested in how we feel and whether everything is going well for us, rather than thinking about what is God desiring of us in our lives? We'd rather think about how am I being taken care of and is God taking care of me? And is He taking care of me in the way that I think he ought to or do I think He should be doing something different or better?

And of course we bring up the topic of Job later on in James and we're like, "Okay, Job, if anybody had anything to complain about, it was him." I mean, he got everything stripped away from him: his livelihood, his family, his health, his friends, everything was stripped away from him. And did he understand what was going on? No. At one point did he kind of think God, why? He wanted to ask God, why is this happening? And did he ever get an answer from God? Not once. God said, "Look, were you there when I created the foundations of the world? Were you there when I set the Leviathan in the waters and the behemoth on land? Were you there when I created all these things? No. Therefore, I have the right to do as I choose to do." We all kind of like to think of God in those terms, but the fact of the

matter is He created all things and therefore He can do with all things as He so chooses.

So we don't have a right to anything from God. We don't have a right to an ease of living. We don't have a right to our health, to our well-being, we had that right in the Garden of Eden and we ate the fruit because we want to be like God and know good and evil. Well, this is the result. We don't have a right to anything. None of the blessings of God do we have a right to.

What we do have a right to is the wrath of God. That's what we rightly deserve, the wrath of God for all of us have sinned in thought, word and deed. And the wages of sin is death. And really that is what all of these passages are starting out with in helping us to see and understand. James here is talking about how woe to the rich, they should weep and to howl because their riches have rotted, their garments are moth-eaten, their gold and silver have corroded. I think that is a concept. Your gold and silver is sitting there protected and not doing any good. You're not actually serving the people of God and so the money is wasted. You've been given this gift, all of these gifts, how are we serving God with the gifts that He has given to us? That is the question that we are to be having with ourselves, with everything, every aspect of our lives. Why do we have this and how can we serve God in this?

Rather than being concerned about how we're being taken care of, we're to forget about our lives. We're not to be concerned about whether we live or die, whether we have health or not, whether we have success or failure. What we're to be concerned about is how are we serving God? How can we give thanks to God for the gifts that He has given to us? That is why He has put us here on earth. That is why we are here today. That is why He has not taken us once we are baptized and saved, why He doesn't automatically just then take us to heaven. Because in our baptism we are saved. We're good with God because He has chosen us.

And so as far as we are concerned, we have peace with God. And so our lives are fulfilled and complete, but God has not saved us in a vacuum. He has saved us and set us in this world to bear the light of the world to those who do not yet know. And He has given each and every one of us a different talent and skill and vocation and calling. And each and every one of us are called to seek His will in our particular way of life and in our particular situation in life. When I was in college, I served as an usher in a movie theater, the guys that clean up afterwards and make sure everything's clean for the next movie that comes in. That was my job while I was in school.

I witnessed Christ to more non-Christians when I was an usher working in a movie theater than I have as a pastor practically. Because my job as a pastor is to talk to fellow Christians most of the time. Every once in a while I get to talk to people who are not Christian, but a vast majority of my time is spent talking to people

who are already Christians and encouraging them. But I also got a chance to serve God as an usher in a movie theater and to share the love of God with people that I would've never met in any other way. And this is what God is calling us to do in every aspect of our lives. We are called to be the church. As Moses was talking to God, it's like, "Look, I cannot do ... All these people are complaining and all of the responsibility is upon me." Moses said, "I can't do it by myself." And none of us can do it by ourselves either.

I can't bring the church up and fill it by myself. You can't bring the church up and fill it by yourselves. But together, together we can reach out and serve our neighbors and communicate the love of God with everybody that we come in contact with. And you come into a lot of contact with a lot of people that I don't. Each and every one of us has a sphere. We tend to think of good works, of serving God as something great and big. "I've got to have the gospel all figured out and I got to proclaim it, and I got to figure out how to convert somebody right then and there."

But you were also told that if you give a drink of water to somebody because they're thirsty in the name of Christ because you love God, surely your reward will not be taken from you. And God has already prepared works for us to do ahead of time. We don't have to figure out what God wants us to do or figure out some grand plan of things to do. He's already given us things to do. How do you know what those are? Look at your life. Are you a mother? Then there's your primary source of doing good and serving God, being a good mother in the name of the Lord. Are you a neighbor? Be a neighbor under the Lord. Are you a worker? Be a worker under the Lord. Are you young? Listen to your elders and be respectful. Are you an elder? Then teach and train those who are younger.

The whole table of duties that you can find in the small catechism is the very start of the good works that we are called to do. It's not rocket science. It's not something that only those missionaries do, or all the people that we read in the magazine about how they went and served 10,000 people and they gave their lunches away and all these grand marvelous things. Those are great, but not everybody can do them. And not everybody does them. And if you're called to do it, great, be ready for that opportunity. But more than likely, most of the time, the good works that God has called you to do are pretty mundane.

When somebody treats you poorly, treat them with kindness. When somebody needs a helping hand, help them. When you are called to care for a friend or a neighbor, do that. Be kind and gentle in all that you say and do. Pray for God to guide and direct your every act, your every thought in a way that is pleasing to Him. That whatever you have may be used for His honor and glory, and you will be serving God and trusting in Him. In some ways it's also demonstrate patience

and love in this world. Demonstrate confidence and caring. Think about what that would do. I mean, how much of our society is at odds with each other because of the rhetoric that is being pushed? And how different is it to love your neighbor and to do good to those who hate you? That is the good work that God has called us to do. That is what we are to pray for. That is how we are to ask God to guide us and direct us.

That whatever we have, be it money or time or influence or connection, that we say, "God, how might I use this for your glory? How might your name be served in all that we say and do?" And be patient. Do not grumble and complain. You might not get the same meal every day after day, after day after day, but has God provided for you? Does God still love you? Is a greater reward waiting for you? See, this is why we can suffer hardship. This is why even if we are persecuted for our faith, even if we are mocked and ridiculed because we believe in God, we still do not need to get angry or lash out. We still do not need to be rude or disrespectful. We can be calm and polite and loving to those who hate us. We can even rejoice when we suffer because we know this world is not our home. We know that there's something waiting for us that is far beyond what we can possibly imagine.

In this world we will have tribulation, but take heart, God has overcome the world. That is our mantra. That is what we should remember. Take heart. God has overcome. Do not be afraid. Love those who hate you. Be respectful to those who are disrespectful. Give a cup of cold water to somebody that needs it. And in that way, in that way, you are serving God. Don't think that you don't have anything to offer. Everybody has something to offer because God has made you His child and as His child, you know the greatest source of hope and love there is: your loving father. And that's all you got to do is brag on your father, brag on your dad who has done great and marvelous things for you and for them. And come what may in this world, no matter what happens, you can trust Him to care for you. We don't need to be jealous. We don't need to be anxious. We don't need to be angry. We're called to walk in love.

So along those lines also then, think about the struggles that you have, the challenges that you have, the places where you are tempted to go against the Word of God and focus upon His word that it might inform you that you might be willing to give up whatever it is that is hindering your walk with God. Because walking with God is more important and more valuable than anything else in this world because He loves you, because you don't deserve anything, and yet you have received everything. We don't deserve any blessings from God, and yet we have His very name upon us, we have been adopted by Him, and we are heirs of the promise. Think about our inheritance. What is it that we are heirs of? Eternal life,

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salvation, forgiveness of sins, life with God without fear. All of that is ours now. What is there to be anxious about?

Thank Him and praise Him and ask him to guide each and every day because He loves His children and he wants His children to demonstrate that love to those around them. May His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide with you always now and forever, more unto life everlasting. Amen.