

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

OLD TESTAMENT – Jeremiah 11:18-20

18 The LORD made it known to me and I knew; then you showed me their deeds. **19** But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. I did not know it was against me they devised schemes, saying, “Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more.” **20** But, O LORD of hosts, who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause.

11:18–23 The first of Jeremiah’s “confessions” (see Introduction: Author and Date). (CSB)

The Lord reveals to Jeremiah that his own townspeople of Anathoth are plotting to kill him. It is not surprising that rebels conspiring to dethrone God should also seek to silence His messenger. Jeremiah does not desire personal revenge; he would have given his life to save his people. Nevertheless, as God’s spokesman, his cause is also God’s cause. Those who tell him not to prophesy are in effect telling God He has no right to impose His will on them. God vindicates His prophet’s jealous zeal for his Lord by ordering Jeremiah to declare the punishments of death and disaster for the people of Anathoth. Jesus also pronounced woes on His adversaries (cf Mt 23:33). (TLSB)

11:18-20 Our text is part of a larger unit that begins at 11:1 with this formula: “The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD” and ends at 13:27. A parallel prophetic formula, “The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD,” introduces a new unit at 14:1. The sub-units in chs 11–13 mix poetry and prose in a series of oracles (some in dialogue form) that explain why God is bringing judgment on his people. The oracles are undated and could have been delivered at any time in Jeremiah’s ministry (about 627–587 BC). One way to divide the section is as follows:

11:1–17: Yahweh commands Jeremiah to announce that he will bring disaster upon Israel because she has broken the covenant.

Dialogue:

11:18–20: *Jeremiah* laments his suffering to God.

11:21–23: *Yahweh* responds to him that Jeremiah’s oppressors will die by the sword.

12:1–4: *Jeremiah* laments a second time, asking God, “Why do the wicked prosper?”

12:5–6: *Yahweh* suggests that greater hardship is ahead for Jeremiah.

12:7–17: *Yahweh* himself laments Judah’s fate.

13:1–27: Jeremiah is commanded to perform symbolic acts.

The text, 11:18–20, is the first of seven “laments” (also called “confessions” or “complaints”; the others are 12:1–6; 15:10–21; 17:14–18; 18:18–23; 20:7–13; and 20:14–18) in which Jeremiah expresses his deepest spiritual and emotional distress. In this section, Jeremiah’s distress is countered by Yahweh’s own lament over the destruction of Judah. The laments together express deep grief and pain over Judah’s sin; we get a glimpse of the sorrow and pain that evil causes God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

11:18 *made it known* - *’az hir’ibani ma’alalehem*, “Then you showed me their deeds.” Though *’az* (“then”) usually marks a temporally or logically subsequent action, it is sometimes used to place emphasis on a phrase (Josh 22:21; Gen 49:4; Ex 15:15). Here: “*Surely* you showed me their deeds.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

their. Jeremiah’s personal enemies, the “men of Anathoth” (vv. 21, 23), his hometown. (CSB)

There is a switch from third person address (“*The Lord* made it known to me”) in the first half of the verse to second person (“*You* showed me their works”) in the last half. This kind of switch, known as *enallage*, is common in Hebrew poetry. The switch to direct address lessens the distance between Jeremiah and Yahweh, and it seems like a bold and non-deferential way to talk to God. Jeremiah is not afraid of God (cf. 12:1–4). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

They were Jeremiah’s personal enemies. Verses 21 and 23 tell us that they were the men of Anathoth which was his hometown. Jesus, too, was not liked or welcome in his home town. They didn’t like the prophecies from God that he was sharing. Bad news is seldom welcome except maybe by wise people.

Jeremiah’s preaching had hit home – too close to home. His own fellow-villagers turned against him. Anathoth is located in the territory of Benjamin and was assigned to the priests. Although Jeremiah was related to the priestly clan, his kinsmen found his message incredible. They had witnessed the great renewal under Josiah. That renewal was certainly a move in the right direction. What more did Jeremiah want? Why not give credit for the progress already made? Didn’t his preaching threaten to undermine everything? Surely God’s people, and especially His priests, did not need someone telling them what to do and how to think. Jeremiah began to experience firsthand the truth of the proverb once used by Jesus, “A prophet has no honor in his own country” (John 4:44). (PBC)

This incident was to shatter his illusions. It demonstrated to him how little the reformation of Josiah had reached their hearts. The people had not changed, and they did want to change their ways. Thus Jeremiah gained further insight into the immense difficulty of his ministry as God’s prophet. (PBC)

11:19 *lamb led to the slaughter.* *’alluf*, a noun/adjective variously translated as “obedient,” “gentle,” “friend,” “companion.” In combination with *kebes* (“lamb,” “young ram”) it might be translated as “gentle/docile lamb,” “pet lamb,” and so on. The simile “I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter” momentarily evokes our pity for Jeremiah and our disdain for his enemies. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

This type of lamb was tame because it had been raised in an environment without fear. That made it all the more vulnerable. This reflects Isaiah 53:7 and how Jesus was to and did die. Those who follow Jesus should come to expect the same treatment. (QV)

Romans 8:36 “As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

I did not know – vəlo’ yada’ti ki ’alay chashəbu machashabat, “I did not know it was against me they devised schemes saying . . .” This clause (introduced by a *və*) explains why Jeremiah thought he was like a lamb being led to the slaughter (i.e., “for I did not know . . .”). The *ki ’alay* introduces the object clause after the verb of perception (*yada’ti*). ESV has added “saying” in the translation, which is absent in the Hebrew text. In the Hebrew text, the enemies’ speech suddenly “breaks in on” Jeremiah. The jarring syntax matches the harshness of their words. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

destroy the tree and its fruit. Contrast 12:2. (CSB)

This was a good way to totally get rid of someone. If you don’t like what someone is saying then kill him and his speech will stop. People also do that to rulers whose governance they don’t like. Chapter 12:2 however, tells us that what God plants no one can destroy. (PBC)

cut him off from the land of the living. See Isa 53:8; contrast Ps 27:13. (CSB)

usāmo lo' yizzaker 'od. This clause (again introduced by an *u*) is still part of the enemies' speech and describes the *result* the enemies hope to realize by killing Jeremiah: "so *that* his name be remembered no more." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

kawrath – To cut off in such a manner as to destroy and totally consume.

name. Since Jeremiah had no children (see 16:2), his name would die with him. (CSB)

be remembered no more. As though he were evil (see Job 24:20; Eze 21:32). (CSB)

His name would die out. This was a very bad thing and to be avoided at all costs.

11:20 Repeated almost verbatim in 20:12; see also 17:10. (CSB)

who judges righteously. shopet tsedeq, "who judges righteously," the substantive *tsedeq* (righteousness) can function as an adverb, as it does here (cf. Deut 1:16; Prov 16:13). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

"But, O LORD of hosts, who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause." Jeremiah assumes his own innocence without fear. So, he moves from the Lord "who judges righteously" and "who tests the heart and mind" to his prayer for vengeance on *them*. Jeremiah is not afraid of being tested and judged by God. The "depressed" Jeremiah is not in evidence here. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

to you have a I committed my cause – This he could do because he totally trusted God who had shown himself worthy of such confidence.

"Let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause." Jeremiah's plea parallels that of his enemies, "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more" (v 19). But the prayer for vengeance in Jeremiah's mouth is somewhat unsettling because we have learned that God's people are to *love* their enemies and do good to those who hate them (Mt 5:43–44). At this point, our sympathy for Jeremiah and our ability to identify with him may weaken. And maybe they should. The prophet had a unique role in Israel that anticipated Christ; in Jeremiah's suffering, the suffering of *the* Prophet is foreshadowed. Jeremiah prays for vengeance on his enemies, but in the Gospel, Christ does not. Like the imprecatory psalms, Jeremiah's prayer may pose a problem for modern ears. How are we to understand his plea? (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

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vengeance on his enemies, but in the Gospel, Christ does not. Like the imprecatory psalms, Jeremiah's prayer may pose a problem for modern ears. How are we to understand his plea? (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

This call was not for personal satisfaction, but to announce that those who stand against the Lord's Word cannot prosper or escape His judgment. Such vengeance would also serve as a warning to any others who might want to resist or threaten the prophet. (PBC)

EPISTLE – James 3:13-4:10

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. 18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

3:13 *wise and understanding.* Refers to the teachers of v 1, who claimed to be faithful but were acting otherwise. Cf Dt 1:13–15. (TLSB)

meekness of wisdom. Both are attributes of a righteous person (cf 1:5; Mt 5:5). (TLSB)

The apostle now makes a direct application of the lessons contained in the first part of the chapter: Who is wise and intelligent among you? Let him show his works out of an excellent conduct in the meekness of wisdom. Christians should make use of proper wisdom, prudence, and common sense; they should show that their intelligence, controlled by their obedience to the Word of God, is well able to direct their actions in life. Such wisdom is not boastful and proud, vaunting itself at the expense of others, but it is modest, humble, meek. It does the right thing, it behaves itself in a conduct which agrees with the will of God, not with the purpose of seeking its own glory, but only that of serving the Lord, this in itself being a sufficient reward for the believer. In this spirit he performs the works which the Word of God teaches him as pleasing the heavenly Father. (Kretzmann)

3:14 *jealousy and selfish ambition.* Sins frequently singled out in the NT, for they destroy the community created by God (e.g., 1Co 3:3). (TLSB)

boast. Cf 4:16. (TLSB)

false to the truth. Denying one's sinfulness also denies God's Word. (TLSB)

3:15 *not wisdom that comes down* – But if all that theoretical wisdom is yielding a life full of bitterness, envy, and selfish ambition, it is no wisdom at all but pompous gas. (PBC)

Gift from God that makes us alive in faith and guides us to live by His Word (cf Pr 2:1–9). (TLSB)

from above. From God (see 1:5, 17; 1Co 2:6–16). (CSB)

earthly, unspiritual, demonic. Sin is not from God but from the world, which is controlled by evil. (See a similar contrast in 1:13–15.) (TLSB)

3:16 Just as the small tongue can start a great fire (v 5), so desire leads to sin that can destroy the self (cf Mk 7:20–23) and others. (TLSB)

jealousy - dzaylos – To have jealousy that is fervent, zealous and includes malice.

Disorder, evil practices, fights, and quarrels result from envy and selfish ambition. It is the inner motives of the heart that result in these outward actions. James turns his attention now to these motives. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The word *zēlos* can mean “zeal” in the good sense (2 Cor 11:2), but in the New Testament it usually means “envy, jealousy” in an evil sense. V 14 describes it as “bitter” (as opposed to fresh or sweet, 3:11–12). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The word for selfish ambition (*eritheia*) was used by Aristotle to denote “a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means” (BAGD 309b). It denotes concern for oneself at the expense of the people whom one should be serving. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

Where these attitudes reside, there you may also expect to find disorder. Things are thrown into disarray because people begin to think only of their own private causes. Disorder leads to “every evil practice.” So it is when people (and some factions in the church) are so puffed up with their own wisdom that they are unable to listen to God (1:19–22). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

selfish ambition - erithiah – At that time it had the meaning of being self-seeking for political purposes.

This was used by Aristotle to denote a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means. It denotes concern for oneself at the expense of the people for whom one should be serving. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 1, Part 4)

This, in fact, is the only fruit that can be expected where emulation and party-strife, jealousy and rivalry, exist, where every one insists upon having his own ideas accepted, regardless of the views of others. Naturally, there will be disturbances, disorders, everything will be upset in such a congregation, a condition will result which will give rise to every evil deed, the passions finally having free and full sway. (Kretzmann)

disorder. “God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (1Co 14:33). (CSB)

akatastahsee – Instability that leads to confusion and tumult.

Evil practices, fight and quarrels result from envy and selfish ambition. It is the inner motives of the heart that result in these outward actions. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 1, Part 4)

Caused by those with their false wisdom and wind up troubling the group of believers by demanding their own rights and exercising a party spirit. When used with political associations, the word speaks of anarchy. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

vile practice – Evil is fowlos – To have a wicked and foul intent. Practice is *pragmah* which means a deed, affair, or a way of doing business.

3:17 The Father wishes to give us the gift of true wisdom from above—revealed wisdom versus the so-called wisdom of this world. Moses taught the Israelites who were about to enter the Promised Land that God’s laws contained wisdom found in no other nation on earth. By obeying and observing these laws they would evangelize the world. They would show other peoples that God had revealed his gracious wisdom and knowledge (Dent 4:5–8). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

Similarly for the Christian, wisdom is more than a set of rules and laws. Wisdom personified has become flesh in Jesus Christ. He is both the power and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24). In him all the fullness of God now dwells in bodily form (Col 2:10). So believers are encouraged to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom” (Col 3:16). Like the Israelites, as Christians live according to the wisdom of God, they are an evangelistic witness to the world. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

In contrast to the wisdom of this world which leads to quarrels and division, James now outlines what God’s wisdom produces. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

first pure. Our hearts are purified by Christ (4:8) and therefore unstained by the world (1:27). (TLSB)

This wisdom is first of all pure (*hagnē*, related to “holy”). The fact that God is holy means that he is separate, unlike the “gods” and the people of this world. In his purity and majesty he is therefore worthy of veneration and worship. So it is with the wisdom that comes down from God. It too is holy, pure, chaste, spotless, and undefiled by the ways and the thinking of this world. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 1, Part 4)

then. Good works flow from a heart that has been purified by Christ. The traits listed enable us to build others up. All contrast with cursing and boasting (vv 9–10, 14). (TLSB)

open to reason. Or, “humane.” (TLSB)

Wisdom is also considerate (*epieikēs*, in contrast to being callous or unreasonable. Peter urges believing slaves to submit not only to good and “considerate” masters, but also to those who are harsh and unjust, causing them to suffer. Thus they follow the example set for them by Christ (1 Pet 2:18–23). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

Further, wisdom is submissive (*eupeithēs*), another word unique to James in the New Testament, from the verb “to be persuaded.” Wisdom teaches the believer to be submissive and obedient out of love for God and concern for others, including the unity of the church. Paul uses a different word but the same concept when he teaches believers to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

mercy. Cf 2:13. (TLSB)

This wisdom is also “peace-loving” (*eirēnikē*). The word is used elsewhere in the New Testament only in Heb 12:11, where it is called the fruit of God’s discipline. In Prov 3:17 we learn that all the paths of wisdom are *shalom*—“shalom, peace”—implying far more than freedom from war. It connotes security,

safety, and wholeness for all who are in the covenant with God. It is a gift of God and a sign of his grace (Is 54:10). For the Christian, shalom is that relationship which has been made possible by Jesus, the Prince of peace. He is our peace (Eph 2:14–17). Because of him we have peace with God (Rom 5:1). He, who is God's wisdom, produces within his followers this same peace as they relate to others. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

impartial. Theme of 2:1–13. Luther: “It is certain that no man who is busy with commandments or righteousness performs this true service [true religion]. They cannot even comprehend it intellectually. For it is a teaching revealed from heaven which does not arise from the human heart or mind. The Holy Spirit must be the Teacher and Guide. Since He reaches men only through faith in Christ, whereas the work-righteous reject faith and retain the Law, it is impossible for them to perform this service. Therefore the Christian religion is easy, as I said, if you regard only the outward acts. But if you consider this spiritual service, it is most difficult, for you cannot perform this unless your heart is changed” (AE 12:87). (TLSB)

Finally, wisdom is “impartial and sincere.” (Both are alpha privative words—words formed by adding the negative prefix *a-*, like English *a-social*, etc.) The impartial man looks at all sides fairly and does not show favoritism (on which see the previous sermon study). The second word is the negative of “hypocrite.” The term originally described an actor, the person who interpreted or explained the story. Later, the word then came to imply a pretender, phony, fake, fraud—all of which a sincere person is not. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

submissive – *yoopithace* – to be compliant.

Peter urges believing slaves to submit not only to good and considerate masters, but also to those who are harsh and unjust, causing them to suffer. Thus they will follow the example set for them by Christ (1 Peter 2:18-23) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 1, Part 4)

This is another word unique to James in the NT, from the verb “to be persuaded.” Wisdom teaches the believer to be submissive and obedient out of love for God and concern for others, including the unity of the church. Paul uses a different word but the same concept when he teaches believers to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 1, Part 4)

The word is used of submission to military discipline and for observance of legal and moral standards in ordinary life (e.g., one who willingly submits to a fatherly will). He has a ready ear for the please of others. Does not this sound like a description of Christ in the Gospels! (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

good fruits – Good is *agathos* and means to do something that is of benefit to others. Fruit is *karpos* which is fruit that can be plucked.

Wisdom is also “full of mercy and good fruit.” Once again this phrase describes God. “God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Rom 11:32–33). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

impartial. See 2:1–13. (CSB)

adeekreetos – To treat people in a manner that shows no distinguishable difference.

Sincere - anoopokreetos – To be without hypocrisy and nothing fake.

3:18 *harvest of righteousness*. Bounty of righteous actions. The list in v 17 is only representative; there is no limit to the benefits others receive from our righteous actions. (TLSB)

Repeated for emphasis. Contrasts with the cursing, poisonous tongue (vv 6–10) and echoes Mt 5:9. (TLSB)

One doesn't just do rightly because one makes peace. Rather because one is righteous in Christ, he or she produces peace. For fruit of righteousness see Is. 32:16-18; Amos 6:12; Prov 11:30; 2 Cor 9:10; Phil 1:11; Heb 12:11. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

sow - spiro – To scatter the seed.

Those who work for peace are planters and sowers; their seed will take root, grow, and spread. The harvest produced will be righteousness and peace. Once again, James echoes Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. This is James' version of "Blessed are the peace-makers, for they will be called the sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). It also reflects Proverbs 11:30, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life," and Isaiah 32:17, "The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever." Vv 17-18 portray the wise Christian in stark contrast to the persons described in v 16. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 1, Part 4)

who make peace. Contrast v. 16. Discord cannot produce righteousness. (CSB)

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Truly wise teachers are pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, merciful, impartial, and sincere, and that kind of leadership and teaching bears a wonderful harvest: many more new Christians who are like that. (PBC)

Ch 3 There are only two ways to live: by the "wisdom" of the world or by God's wisdom. James condemns the worldly pattern of selfishness, deception, hurtful words, and other evil behaviors. Christians, too, struggle with such sins and are even tempted to present themselves as holier than others. How different is the wisdom of God! He has purified us in Christ and freed us from the stain of the world. We now walk in the works He has prepared for us to do. • O Lord, purify me so that my words may uplift, strengthen, bring peace where there is strife, and bring sincerity where there is falsehood. Use my lips to speak Your glory, to tell of Your wonderful deeds, and to proclaim Your salvation. Amen. (TLSB)

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. 4 You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says,

“He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? 6 But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

4:1 *what causes* - polemos – To cause battles, unrest or war.

Quarrels - makhay – To cause controversy or strife.

Struggles with others. James shows the sinful source. (TLSB)

passions. The Greek for this term is the source of our word “hedonism.” (CSB)

Desires, such as jealousy and ambition (3:14), that give sinful pleasure. (TLSB)

It appears that this community of believers was still under the influence of the world in which it lived. If so, then they were like believers of all generations, including the present. This chapter continues to call the reader to turn away from friendship with the world and to repent. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 1, Part 4)

at war. This sinful nature fights against the new person in Christ. (TLSB)

Military imagery is used. A literal translation could be, “Why are there wars and battles among you? Isn’t it because your hedonistic desires are soldiering in your members?” The desires, lusts, and cravings that were the culprits can choke out faith, as Jesus pointed out: “The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature” (Luke 8:14). Peter also urges, “abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul” (1 Pet 2:11). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

When someone has an out-of-control mouth, you can trace the problem back to a heart that has no peace or contentment and to a mind full of bitterness and selfishness. It is the same with people who fight and quarrel and apparently James had been hearing that such things were going on in some of the congregations of the scattered brothers and sisters. (PBC)

4:2-3 Desires are not satisfied; wants are not met. So what do you do? You kill (cf. Matt 5:21–22), covet, quarrel, and fight. What you really need you don’t pray for, and what you pray for you desire for the wrong reason. In 1:5, James encouraged his readers to ask God for wisdom, which God gives generously. James’ readers had instead asked for other things, and only in order to spend or squander, as did the prodigal son (Luke 15:14) on their pleasures—the same word translated in v 1 as “desires.” Christians too often think that a person’s life consists in the abundance of goods and pleasures. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

4:2 *murder*. Figurative (hyperbole) for “hate.” (CSB)

Desires lead to sinful attitudes that Scripture equates with murder (1Jn 3:15); they can also lead to spiritual death (Jas 1:14–15). Murder may not have literally taken place in Christian congregations, but

the sin of envy, left unchecked, could lead to such abominable behavior. Jealousy led to violence in Gn 4:1–16; 37; Mk 15:10; Ac 5:17–18. 1 Clement of Rome (1st Epistle): “Envy and jealousy led to the murder of a brother [Abel]” (ANF 1:6). (TLSB)

you do not ask. Asking for the things that God has promised to give is key, as in Jas 1:5–8, where asking God for wisdom is encouraged (cf v 3). (TLSB)

4:3 *you ask wrongly.* Not that the wrong words are used but that the motive is selfish, seeking only worldly treasures. Instead of selfish prayer, intercessory prayer for others is encouraged (5:14–15). James is not developing a complete theology of prayer but demonstrating that people without wisdom from God cannot pray properly. (TLSB)

They pray asking for their own selfish, evil desires. Notice earlier in 4:2 – the people are too busy fighting even to pray. They are like the double-minded person praying in 1:6-8. They trust their own actions and the world rather than God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

you ask wrongly – kakoce – To be diseased, evil or sick.

Spend it on your passions – dapanaho – To expend or even waste.

4:4 *adulterous people.* Those who are spiritually unfaithful, who love the world rather than God. For spiritual adultery see, e.g., Jer 31:32. (CSB)

Echoes Yahweh’s condemnation of Israel’s covenant unfaithfulness (see notes, Is 57:3; Hos 3:1). God made us His Bride through faith in Christ; rejecting Him for the world’s ways is adultery. (TLSB)

The adultery of this verse may be literal, or it may refer to the worship of the pleasures of the world, often compared in the Bible to a wife’s infidelity (Ezek 16:15ff., 23:45ff., etc.). Friendship with the world makes one an enemy of God. James seems to be recalling Jesus’ teaching that his disciples have been called out of the world; consequently the world hates and persecutes them, just as it did him. If they belonged to the world, it would love them as its own (John 15:18ff.). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

moykhalis – To be unfaithful. The Scriptures use this terminology when describing how Israel was unfaithful to God.

The term is a figure of speech particularly in the OT to indicate unfaithfulness to God (Israel as God’s unfaithful wife) and the practices of idolatry, here the false god being “world.” Only readers who were familiar with the OT would understand what James was saying. Also compare the picture of the “Bride of Christ” in 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:22-24; Rev 21:9. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

James’ readers were probably no longer tempted by Baal worship, but Satan arranged that there would be plenty of new idols to take Baal’s place. Martin Luther once said that the human heart is an idol factory. (PBC)

wishes to be a friend of the world – Boulatha – The word has the connotation of preference or choosing one thing before another. The apostate has no middle ground; he is either God’s friend or his

enemy (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13). You cannot serve both God and money” (Mt. 6:24). The attempt to cultivate the world is disaster. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

Not mere acquaintance but a sharing in all things. A life devoted to wealth and selfish ambition has no room for God. (TLSB)

4:5 Scripture.† The passage James had in mind is not definitely known. (CSB)

May be translated “Do you suppose that the Scripture speaks uselessly? Does the spirit that He causes to dwell in us crave jealously? (TLSB)

The word *graphē*, “Scripture,” is singular, commonly used for a New Testament reference to a particular Old Testament passage. The exact wording James cites is nowhere to be found in either testament, but the thought is similar to descriptions of God’s jealousy as in Deut 20:5. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The verse itself is variously translated. The point made, however, is this: God has made the Holy Spirit dwell within us. The Spirit gives us zeal for God and for doing good. But the Spirit is also jealous, striving to keep us faithful to God and undefiled by the idolatry of worshiping false “gods,” including our “desires.” Paul says something similar when he writes about the Spirit interceding for us with groans that words cannot express (Rom 8:26–27). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

to no purpose - kenoce – Without purpose or in vain.

He yearns jealousy over the spirit. The words “the spirit he caused to live in us” refer to God’s creation of man (Ge 2:7). Because of the fall, man’s spirit “envies intensely,” but God’s grace (v. 6) is able to overcome man’s envy. Regarding the two alternative translations (see NIV text note), the meaning of the first is that God jealously longs for our faithfulness and our love (see 4:4). In this case the Scripture referred to may be Ex 20:5. The second capitalizes “Spirit” and makes him the subject. It is the Holy Spirit who longs jealously for our full devotion. If this is the correct translation, it is the only clear reference to the Holy Spirit in the letter. (CSB)

Not the Holy Spirit (who is not mentioned in Jas), but the person’s spirit that God has enlivened. (TLSB)

God is a jealous Creator. He created man for fellowship with Himself, so when man chooses to be a friend with the world, God has reason to be jealous! (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

Enviety is *fthonos* – To have ill will and spitefulness. Intensely is *epepothē* – To have desire that craves or lusts to do something.

With challenging fervor the apostle asks: Or do you suppose that the Scripture says in vain, Even unto jealous envy that Spirit which He made to dwell in us does yearn (for us)? Such behavior as the apostle has just described is absolutely incompatible with the ideals which the Lord holds out before the Christians in His Word. Cp. Gal. 5, 17, 21; Rom. 8, 6, 8; 1 Cor. 3, 16. These and similar passages, which are found in many parts of Scriptures, indicate definitely that the Lord watches over the behavior of the Christians with jealous envy. The Holy Spirit who has come to dwell in our hearts strives unceasingly to have us acquire the same love for God and His holy will which He bears for us and for our highest development along spiritual lines. Any behavior on our part, therefore, that tends to dislodge the Holy Spirit from our hearts, will retard our spiritual growth. (Kretzmann)

4:6 *He gives more grace.* Or, “He gives a greater gift,” referring to God as the giver of gifts, specifically wisdom (1:5, 17). Luth: “Those who say: Ah, but I have done as much as I possibly can; I have done enough, and I hope that God will give me grace—they set up an iron wall between themselves and the grace of God. But if you feel within yourself the urge to call upon God and pray and plead and knock, then grace is already there; then call upon it and thank God” (AE 51:43). (TLSB)

James quotes Prov 3:34—God gives grace to the humble, but opposes the proud. Peter quotes the same passage as he calls for his readers to clothe themselves with humility toward one another in order that God might lift them up (1 Pet 5:5–6). This is the theme of the great reversal, a frequent Gospel theme in the Old Testament. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

opposes the proud – Opposes is *anteetassomahee* and means to set oneself against another and resist him. Proud is *hoopotithaymee* and means to have the attitude that places others below oneself.

Gives grace to the humble - *tapinos* – To be cast down, depressed or of low degree.

James quotes Prov 3:34 – God gives grace to the humble, but opposes the proud. Peter quotes the same passage as he calls for his readers to clothe themselves with humility toward one another in order that God might lift them up (1 Peter 5:5–6). This is the theme of the great reversal, a frequent Gospel theme in the OT. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 1, Part 4)

All sins may be said to have their root and origin in the pride of the human heart, which refuses to bow to the will of the Lord. Christians, therefore, will deny themselves and depend upon the help promised from above: But He gives greater grace; wherefore He says: God sets Himself against the proud; to the humble, however, He gives grace. If the Spirit, who has made His abode with us, can but perform His work unhindered by willful transgressions and outbursts of evil lust, then the Lord, through His work in our hearts, will give us grace for a life of proper sanctification. For this truth we have the authority of the Word, in which the Holy Spirit Himself gives us the assurance that, while God always resists the proud, it is His good pleasure to give grace to the humble. Cf. Prov. 3: 34; 1 Pet. 5:5. A Christian’s constant effort, then, will be to conquer and vanquish the natural pride of his heart, through the power of the Spirit that lives in him, and always to offer to the Lord a heart that is willing to hear and to keep His will. Note that the divinity of the Holy Spirit is plainly taught in this passage. (Kretzmann)

4:7–10 These verses contain ten commands, each of which is so stated in Greek that it calls for immediate action in rooting out the sinful attitude of pride. (CSB)

4:7 *submit yourselves therefore to God* – *hpotagate* means to align oneself under the authority of another. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

To place oneself under God’s authority, which is shown most powerfully when He forgives. Parallels “Humble yourselves” in v 10. How submission and humbling takes place is described in vv 7–10. The language of these verses strongly echoes OT calls to repentance. Cf Is 57:14–16. (TLSB)

Since God gives grace to those who humble themselves before him (4:6; Prov 3:34), the believer is encouraged to submit to God. It should be repeated that James is not instructing unbelievers about the way to faith, but exhorting Christians who are remiss in acting on the basis of their faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The double directive of this verse recalls Jesus' response to his temptation (Matt 4:1–11). As Jesus did, so we rebuke Satan by the authority and power of God (cf. the 72 who were sent out, Luke 10:1–17). By Jesus' power, Satan is defeated—he falls “like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). With Jesus we may say, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only’” (Matt 4:10). Take your stand for the Lord and Satan must flee. He has no other choice (cf. also 1 Peter 5:6ff.). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

In verses 8–10 James lays out what is involved in submitting to God. His description is similar to the Beatitudes. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

When people are living in defiance of the First Commandment, when they do not fear, love and trust in God above all things, their obedience to all the rest of the commandments will unravel. To submit to God means to believe His claim that you are accountable to Him, to acknowledge Him as first in your life, to subordinate your will to His, to open your ears and heart to His Word, to let Him steer your choices and decisions, to let Him set your limits of right and wrong. This is not slavery but the perfect law that gives sweet freedom. Rather, it is obsession with self that is slavery. (PBC)

The need of this attitude is spoken of by the apostle: Submit yourselves, then, to God; but set yourselves against the devil, and he will flee from you. That is the characteristic of the believers of all times, that they overcome the haughtiness and pride of their evil nature more and more, and place themselves, with all their gifts and abilities, in the hands of God, whether for good days or for bad, Ps. 37, 5. As the Lord teaches them in His Word, so do they unhesitatingly follow, even though it means entire denial of self. (Kretzmann)

Resist the devil. See Eph 6:11–18; 1Pe 5:8–9. (CSB)

Parallels “Draw near to God” in v 8 and refers back to the evil wisdom of 3:15. Resisting the devil is, therefore, the same as turning to God in repentant prayer (cf 1Pt 5:8–9). (TLSB)

Antistate is an aorist imp. Which calls for urgent action. Remember Jesus' example of resisting the devil in Mt. 1:11 by using the Word of God and that after his temptations were resisted, the devil left. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

Every military strategist knows that warfare is waged not only with weapons but also with psychology. Breaking the enemy's confidence and will to resist can be just as effective in defeating him as a frontal assault. Satan knows this. He floods us with propaganda that his evil ways are inevitable, good, harmless, irresistible, and fulfilling. Resist him! Fight! Armed with God's Word, you are stronger than he, and he will flee from you! (PBC)

And in performing this part of their Christian calling, they will set themselves against, they will resist with all the power at their command, the wiles and temptations of the devil. It is a matter of ceaseless vigilance, of tireless battling; but there is only one outcome possible, namely, the flight of the devil. With God and the Word on our side, the victory is bound to be ours. (Kretzmann)

4:8 draw near to God – “Come near to God and he will come near to you.” This reflects God's promise in Zech 1:3; Mal 3:7. When Moses was on Sinai, God warned him that the people were not permitted to approach the mountain (Exod 19:20–24). Only Moses and Aaron were to go up. But we who have a high priest in Christ (Heb 10:22) may “draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

Through the blood of Jesus, it is never too late. Through the miracle of God’s grace, a repentant sinner is never turned away. And when God draws near to you, good things happen, and your life gets better in every way. (PBC)

In a prayer of repentance (cf Ps 119:169–70; Hos 12:6) (TLSB)

cleanse your hands. Before the OT priests approached God at the tabernacle, they had to wash their hands and feet at the bronze basin as a symbol of spiritual cleansing (Ex 30:17–21). See Ps 24:4 for the imagery of “clean hands and a pure heart.” (CSB)

“Wash your hands . . . purify your hearts.” As a Jewish Christian, James uses the well-known phraseology of Ps 24:4, the extension of Ex 30:17–21. Priests were required to wash their hands and feet before approaching God. James does not address ritualistic hypocrisy as did Jesus (Mark 7:1–23), but makes the same point in the verse’s closing injunction: “purify your hearts, you double-minded.” What is important is not ritual or ceremonial purity, but hearts purified by faith in Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

James isn’t really interested in a physical washing but rather the repentance of double-minded sinners. The Christian is constantly torn between two lovers, God and Satan. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

This is picture language for repenting for all the evil things your hands have done. Soap and water cannot do what God demands, but faith in Christ gives Christians clean hands. (PBC)

purify your hearts – James refers to his listeners as “double-minded.” A great trick of Satan’s is to persuade people to keep their religious beliefs compartmentalized, “Sundayized,” cut off from influencing their day-to-day words and actions in the real world. James urges us to break down the walls that keep our scriptural faith isolated and to be single-mindedly devoted to God. (PBC)

Based on Ps 24:3–4. “Heart” refers to intention; “hands” refers to action. Both attitudes and actions are purified by repentance and forgiveness. (TLSB)

9:9-10 “Grieve, mourn, wail . . . humble yourself.” The second of Jesus’ beatitudes is reflected here: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matt 5:4). Mourning and grieving occur in the presence of death, a process that occurs daily in the believer’s life, as Luther’s Small Catechism reminds us concerning Baptism (see especially Rom 6:1–14). As recovering drug or alcohol addicts know, to give up the way of sin is painful and brings anger, guilt, depression, and fear. The old ways do not die easily. This is why, as James teaches later, we are to confess our sins “to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (5:16). The Lord, in turn, promises to be in the midst of his people to lift them up. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

4:9 *be wretched and mourn and weep.* Repent. (CSB)

Actions described by the prophets as signifying or calling for repentance (cf Mi 2:4; Jl 1:5). (TLSB)

Talaipoasate (grieve) means to feel miserable and undergo hardship, referring to the inner attitude of repentance. It is necessary to mourn and wail now so that when the judgment comes you will not have to mourn and wail then. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

Penthastate (mourn) is often connected with the term weep describing grief that brings tears to the eyes. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

This may seem peculiar coming from a man whose letter began with a “Rejoice!” greeting. James is not saying that a Christian’s life must be characterized by constant grief. He is saying what his brother Jesus said in Luke 6:21: “Blessed are you who weep now.” Grieving, mourning, and wailing are appropriate and necessary for people who have been finding joy in sinning. James’ point is this: real repentance is not only theoretical but emotional too, affecting the whole person (see Psalm 32 and 38). (PBC)

laughter – gelos indicates the leisurely laughter of gods and men in their pleasures. It is the laughter of a fool who rejects God as the One who determines reality and believes man to be an autonomous being. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

Here James’ call to repentance is like that found in Luke 6:25: “Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.” Often people laugh when nervous, especially when one does not want to face the serious facts of life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

More signs of repentance (cf Mi 1:8–9; Jl 1:12). (TLSB)

gloom – katapheia is the downcast gloom of the publican in Luke 18:13. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

4:10 *humble* – tapeinotathe like in Matthew 20:26 and 23:11-12. Jesus is referring to Himself as He humbled Himself in His suffering and death on the cross, and His being raised from death by His Father. Humility is of value only when the believer shares in that of Christ Jesus. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 4)

Result of being laid low before God because of sin (cf v 7; Ps 51:17). Cf Jas 1:9. (TLSB)

exalt you. After repentance comes God’s forgiveness, new life, and ultimately the crown of life (1:12). Jesus teaches that those who humble themselves before God will be exalted (Lk 18:14). (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Mark 9:30–37

30 They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, 31 for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.” 32 But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.

9:30-37 This pericope tells how Jesus provided the Twelve with special training as they traveled around Galilee. At the Transfiguration three of them saw Jesus’ unveiled glory. Less than a year remains before Good Friday and Easter. The Lord’s thoughts are already fastened on the suffering that awaits him, while the disciples focus on status and competition. Jesus intends, by his impending Passion and the value of humble service, to turn around their thinking about what matters and what does not. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 4)

9:30-32 The great Galilean ministry has ended. Now Jesus devotes less effort to public preaching and more to teaching the Twelve. He needs privacy. For the second time he speaks plainly about his approaching suffering, death, and resurrection (see 9:9–10), but “they did not understand what he meant” (v 32). They cannot figure out how his betrayal and death fit with his words about the kingdom of God

and Good News (see Adolf Schiatter, *Die Evangelien nach Markus and Lukas* [Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1961] 93–94). Why do they not tell their Master they are confused? Perhaps because they fear Jesus just might tell them the truth regarding all this! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 4)

Second of Jesus' three predictions of His death and resurrection. The disciples' confusion continued, even though Jesus taught them repeatedly. Luther: "The Law attacks Him and kills Him. By this deed the whole world is purged and expiated from all sins and thus it is set free from death and from every evil. But when sin and death have been abolished by this one man, God does not want to see anything else in the whole world, especially if it were to believe, except sheer cleansing and righteousness. And if any remnants of sin were to remain, still for the sake of Christ, the shining Sun, God would not notice them" (AE 26:280).

9:30 *passed through Galilee.* Jesus' public ministry in and around Galilee was completed, and he was now on his way to Jerusalem to suffer and die (see 10:32–34). As he had been doing for several months, Jesus continued to focus his teaching ministry on the Twelve (v. 31). (CSB)

They left the area around Caesarea Philippi. From this point on Jesus spends much time with the disciples. (Buls)

As he has done previously in Mark, Jesus takes time to be alone with the Twelve to teach them about what will happen. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 4)

The re-entrance into Galilee marks a return to familiar territory, but the public ministry which had stirred the province was not to be resumed. This was simply the first leg of the journey from the territory of Herod Philip through Galilee and Perea to Jerusalem. The subject of the brief section covering the return to Galilee (9:30-50) is Jesus' instruction of the Twelve, first concerning His destiny, and then their responsibility toward one another and toward men of faith beyond their immediate circle. Jesus' intention that His presence in Galilee should be unrecognized reflects not only the desire to instruct the disciples without interruption but a sense of compulsion to press toward Jerusalem where His Messianic mission is to be fulfilled. (Lane)

Thence," from the country or region where they had been for some time; this points to Gaulanitis. They now made a journey through Galilee, their last trip with the Lord through these familiar scenes. He did no public preaching at this time, He wanted no loud heralding. (Kretzmann)

9:31-32 These announcements (Mk 8:31; 9:9–13, 30–32) concerning Jesus' death and resurrection constitute the middle of the Gospel as Jesus finishes his ministry in Galilee and moves on to Judea and the ultimate fulfillment in his passion. The only addition here is that Jesus is going to be *paradivdotai* ("delivered"; passive tense), indicating the betrayal of Judas. This announcement to the disciples is as clear a proclamation of the Gospel story as there could be. Yet, v 32 notes that they did not understand it. The disciples do something with this announcement that seems out of character. They didn't ask him to explain his words. To the end, they did not comprehend what Jesus had taught them many times until they actually saw it completed. But the power of his resurrection and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit made them understand, and moreover transformed them into powerful witnesses of the truth. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 4)

9:31 *Son of Man.* Here is the reason. "He continued to teach them in particular." Note again that he uses the term "Son of man." (Buls)

Bengel: It is already being plotted. Look at John 6:60-71. (Buls)

"Into the hands of" is metaphorical for "power." "Men" will exercise this power at God's permission. "Although He be killed He will rise." In the Matthew account the verb for "kill" occurs only once and "rise" is the passive "will be raised." For a parallel thought, applied to the believer, look at John 11:25: "Though he die, he shall live." At Mark 8:31 Jesus indicated the necessity. Here He speaks of the certainty and adds the element of betrayal. (Buls)

he was teaching his disciples – Jesus once more sets a powerful example of what a good teacher does (continually re-teaches until they get it).

edidasken gar tous mathētas autou, “for he was teaching his disciples.” This sets the stage quite ironically for what is to follow. Jesus’ teaching that he, the master, was willingly on his way to be killed should have made clear to the disciples that pretensions to worldly greatness had no place in their economy. Obviously it was not just the upcoming itinerary that “they did not understand” (v 32). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

His purpose was to be alone with His disciples, for their instruction had not yet proceeded to the point it should reach before the time of His great Passion. He got into the habit of referring to His approaching suffering, above all. The entire subject of His teaching touched upon this important Gospel-lesson. The entire Passion was so vivid before His eyes that He speaks of it in the present tense: He is delivered into the hands of men. First Judas would deliver Him into the hands of the Jewish rulers, then these would deliver Him into the hands of the Roman governor. Note the thought included here: The Son of Man, the redeemer in His divine-human nature, having might and authority over all things, delivered into the hands of men, mere men, weak men, that in themselves are powerless before Him. And they kill him. That was their object, and that was, in their opinion, the end of Him and of His aspirations. For Him, however, it is not the end, but only the beginning. After three days He will arise. The remark of the evangelist at this point is almost pitiful. After all the teaching and repeated teaching and referring to the truth of the Old Testament prophecy that Jesus had done, the disciples went along the way with Him in ignorance as to the word that He was uttering. (Kretzmann)

is going to be delivered – This is a passive action. He is allowing it to happen to him.

For the second time He speaks plainly about His approaching suffering and death, and resurrection (see 9:9-10). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 4)

The King James Version translates the same Greek word as “shall be betrayed” in Matthew 17. (PBC)

9:32 *they did not understand*. There was constant misunderstanding. And "afraid" is a constant state of fear even to ask a single question. By the way, their lack of understanding cannot be blamed on Jesus. Look at Matthew 17:23 and Luke 9:45. The amazing thing is that Jesus was so patient (and still is with us.) Lack of faith was displaced by fear which led to the pride about to be revealed in the next verses. (Buls)

Partly why the disciples didn't understand was that it was a totally foreign concept to the Jews then (and even now) that the Messiah should die. Since they had that mindset, it kept them from realizing what Jesus was telling them. It is keeping many Jews today from believing and having salvation in Jesus. (Buls)

were afraid to ask him – It is someone near Christ who gave Him over to those who will kill Him. No wonder the disciples are afraid to ask any further questions. Rather, they push His coming passion out

of their minds, and instead argue about who of them will be the greatest in the coming kingdom of heaven. (PBC)

9:30–32 Jesus repeats the prophecy of His Passion and resurrection while the disciples listen in frightened silence. Death is frightening and confusing when we cannot see the promised resurrection. Yet, Jesus bears our fears as well as our sins on the cross in order to deliver us. • Lord, break our fear of death by reminding us that You have died, never to die again. Today, open our frightened hearts with the resurrection’s promise; one day, open our closed eyes with the resurrection’s power. Amen. (TLSB)

Who Is the Greatest?

33 And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. 35 And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” 36 And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”

9:33-34 The Lord asks about their discussion out on the road. Like children caught with hands in the cookie jar, they clam up because arguing about who is “the greatest” is unworthy of their calling. (*meizōn* is a comparative used as a superlative, a practice common in Koine Greek.) But Christ doesn’t avoid the problem. Their competitive mindset shows they misunderstood what he was going to do in Jerusalem (v 31). They are tangled in a culture that worries too much about questions of procedure and rank (see William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974] 339). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 4)

9:33-35 Jesus is making his last visit to Capernaum. He continues his teaching as he prepares the disciples for what is to come. He wants the remaining 11 disciples to be unified after he ascends into heaven and warns about what could tear them apart: petty jealousy, envy, and working against each other to be elevated to a higher position. When Jesus points out that “if anyone wills to be first” he uses the words *ei[ti] qevlei* as meaning “one must determine, set his will upon being first. The thing does not drop into one’s lap, it requires will, effort. . . . First and last as men may view the two are not considered here. While the first who is last and thus the last who is first refer to the disciple’s life here among his brethren, they will both be found also in heaven, in the reward of glory bestowed upon him there” (Lenski, *Mark*, 391–92). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 4)

9:33 *Capernaum*. This is His last time there. And it's in private at that. The Galilean ministry is over. Many commentaries, but not all, indicate that it was Jesus' house, but that's not the important thing. What is important is that it was in private. (Buls)

Now a soft question: "What were you discussing on the way?" The translations are perhaps confusing at this point. Of course Jesus knew. Look at Luke 9:47. He asks the question to make them face their sin. The very fact that He asks them shows that they discussed this out of His ear shot. (Buls)

Christ’s last stop in Capernaum is a busy one and is spent for the most part in instructing His disciples. Mark devotes the rest of the chapter to it, and Matthew all of chapter 18. (PBC)

the house. Probably the one belonging to Peter and Andrew (see 1:29). (CSB)

what were you discussing on the way – Because He knew they were coming up with wrong answers, he wanted them to put the question to Him. (PBC)

Jesus knew of the discussion and, by His omniscience, knew also its topic. Therefore the Lord takes occasion to teach them a badly needed lesson. While He had gone before them, busy with the thoughts pertaining to the way of redemption, they had been engrossed with their vain thoughts, how they might enhance their own glory. They must learn, above all, the lesson of the great paradox in the kingdom of God. (Kretzmann)

9:34 *they kept silent.* No doubt due to embarrassment. (CSB)

Like children caught with hands in the cookie jar. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 4)

who was the greatest. Questions of rank and status are normal and played an important role in the life of Jewish groups at this time, but they had no place in Jesus' value system (see v. 35; 10:42–45). (CSB)

Ironically, after the transfiguration and Jesus' Passion prediction, the disciples debated which of them was greatest. (TLSB)

There was an embarrassing pause at this juncture though Matthew 18:1 clearly indicates that someone of the disciples finally broke silence. "Because" explains the painful silence. "They had argued" denotes close reciprocal associational. Jesus hadn't actually heard it. "Argued" means to discuss in the sense of arguing. Although it happened along the way, Jesus confronts them in private. He did not intervene while they were making fools of themselves but waited for a quiet moment. Furthermore, perhaps He foresaw that He needed a little child to teach them a lesson. The child becomes available in the house. (Buls)

tiz meizōn, "who was the greatest." A recurrent discussion among the disciples. It also came up, even more inappropriately timed, in the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday (Lk 22:24). On another occasion, Jesus himself brought up the "greater than" issue regarding John the Baptist (Mt 11:11). In that case too, Jesus turned the discussion upside down. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

Because death was involved, they wanted to move to a new topic. So, they choose this issue. It too, had been explained to them but of course they hadn't gotten that straight either. In a sense this relates to the concept of Jesus' death in that this is about an earthly kingdom and that was what they thought the Messiah would come to establish.

In Mark the dispute over greatness indicates the degree to which the disciples had failed to understand Jesus' solemn affirmation concerning His abandonment to the will of men. It also shows how impregnated they were with the temper of their own culture where questions of precedence and rank were constantly arising. (Lane)

The hearts and the heads of the disciples were yet filled with false Messianic hopes; the idea of a temporal kingdom would not down. And this matter they had discussed on the way, among themselves, disputing about rank, quarreling about who should be considered the greatest in their midst. The question may have been broached at this time because Jesus had taken only three of them: along on the mount of transfiguration. (Kretzmann)

9:35 Greatness according to a fallen world comes by climbing over others, pushing yourself up by putting others down, building your strength on another's weakness. God turns conventional wisdom upside down. In God's kingdom, precisely by placing oneself beneath the weakest, a person gets ahead and becomes

great. Jesus invests the term “servant” with new splendor. Servanthood is not to be shunned, but actually something to which we must aspire. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 4)

Sat down. To teach them that, He called the Twelve before Him, in a very formal and impressive way. They should, for once, get His full meaning. (Kretzmann)

"Sitting down" denotes the deliberate care with which He treated the matter. Judas was there and had heard Jesus prophesy the betrayal in verse 31. What a beautiful veiled warning! "And said," Mark has 151 historic presents, Matthew 78 and Luke only 4. No wonder Mark's account is so vivid. "Anyone" is universal, pertaining to all people. That is amazing. The next two verbs have caused translations and commentators a problem: (Buls)

Does "wants" mean "wishes" or "wills" (has the will and determination)? Does "must be" means "shall" "will" (by his own volition) or "must?" Compare the translations for these various ideas. The problem is solved by noting the "and" is epexegetical: "namely a servant to all." There is the key to the whole sentence. (Buls)

At this point the disciples were likely influence by false notions about the Kingdom. Compare Matthew 18:1. They were still thinking of an earthly kingdom with earthly rulers and wondered what they rank would be in this kingdom. They were thinking of anything but service. They were oblivious to being like Jesus. Mark 10:44-45; Luke 22:27; John 13:1-15; Philippians 2:5-8. By the way, Mark 9:35 does not speak of how one becomes to Christian. It denotes Christian living. But the disciples needed to repent of their pride. See Matthew 18:3. (Buls)

Jesus is actually inviting the disciples to be first, but on terms radically opposite those of the flesh and the world. *Anyone* can be first. According to the world very few are. But firstness in the Kingdom means lastness of all and service to all. That requires repentance, constant repentance. (Buls)

if anyone would be first – The word for “wants” is ethelo which has determination connected to it. It will require thoughtfulness before hand. It is not wrong to aspire to leadership. – No service is too lowly, not even meeting the needs of a child. (PBC)

thelei prōtos einai, “would be first.” This presents a delicate but crucial distinction of Law and Gospel. In our fallenness, every human being wants to be first; essentially we each want to be God. Jesus does not condemn being first. However, desiring to be first can never be the motivation by which one becomes first, and it must not be preached that way. As soon as one does anything out of a desire to be first, he has not made himself last; he has put himself first by following a desire for himself. Therefore, the preacher desiring to make his hearers truly “great” (to motivate them to truly humble service) will proclaim that Christ, by making himself last, has already made us “first.” This is, of course, the reality. Every redeemed soul is of first importance to God. As the new man or woman hears this, that soul believes he or she can gain nothing further for self. The believer is thus free to serve God and neighbor, putting self last. That, then, is living as one who is first, the greatest. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

last of all – Servant Leadership begins by serving.

In the Church of Jesus the reverse is true. There the rank is in proportion to the service offered. The humbler a person is and the more willing he is to serve his fellow-men, the higher he will stand in the economy of God. Instead of urging ambition for high position and power, Christ knows of only one valid reason for fame before Him and His Father, humble, unpretentious service, without a thought of reward. (Kretzmann)

9:36-37 Next Jesus places a child in their midst, an object lesson they did not quickly grasp (see Mk 10:13). Children can be exasperating. They don't always notice or value your service, nor are they in a position to reward you. In the world's way of reckoning, then, it makes sense not to bother with them. But Jesus approaches the question of service in a completely different way. Service isn't great because of the dividends you may reap. It is great when performed for someone great, with no promise of reward in this life. When Jesus says that receiving a child is the same as receiving himself, he endows service with a wonderful greatness. The verb in v 37, *dechomai* (NW: "welcome") signifies much more than a surface "Hi, how are ya?"—a warm embrace, as one welcomes a dear friend to dinner. Lowly service performed for the Christ shouldn't be carried out with a sullen spirit of obligation, but with the joy of receiving a valued guest. With just such joy the Lord himself kept walking toward Jerusalem and the cross. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 4)

Pastors ought to "welcome" every opportunity to preach on this text. It affords the opportunity to issue a corrective to that "me first" mindset that plagues the world and the church today just as it afflicted the Twelve, and it anchors this corrective in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ, who willingly served selfish people like us by his suffering and death—people who cannot reward him for his sacrifice. At the same time we uncompromisingly reject the fallen world's way of getting ahead, we warm our hearers with the comfort of the Gospel! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 4)

Here we find a connection between this week's text and next week's as those who welcome this little child in Christ's name welcome Christ and God. That the one doing the welcoming does so because of faith in the Gospel Jesus has given to him is the important aspect. In the parallel text in Matthew it is also the faith that a child possesses that is noted as one who entirely trusts in the Word of the Lord. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 4)

9:36 *he took a child* – *paheedeeon* – This was a very young child perhaps even an infant. This child represented not even a hint of power. Children have been and continue to be taken advantage of and harmed. They also are the most gullible in life and have great trust in what they are told. Jesus is teaching the disciples to eschew power and to have faith in his gospel actions.

A little child was used as an object lesson for the Apostles. KJV, RSV, NIV, NASB: "Took him in his arms." But NEB: "Put his arm round him." The latter is weak. Don't water it down. (Buls)

That Jesus used a child in illustrating his answer brings a needed lesson to our own age, an age with so many unwanted children, with a murderous mania for aborting children. What greater reason can we have for sharing the gospel? (PBC)

The distinguishing traits of a child are: absence of arrogance, simplicity and humility. (Ylvisaker)

In order to bring home this lesson still more thoroughly, He took a little child that may have been playing in the neighborhood, placed it in their midst, fondled it in His arms to show His deep regard, His tender love for children, and then told the disciples, that in receiving a child, in rendering to one of these little ones a service, they were rendering one to Him. (Kretzmann)

9:37 *whoever receives one these* – *dechomai* signifies much more than a surface "Hi, how are ya?" – a warm embrace, as one welcomes a dear friend to dinner. Lowly service performed for Christ shouldn't be carried out with a sullen spirit of obligation, but with the joy of receiving a valued guest. With just such

joy the Lord Himself kept walking toward Jerusalem and the cross. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 4)

Jesus emphasizes service and humility. Though the child appeared insignificant, he was treasured by the Lord, who focused on serving others. In the kingdom of God, every disciple represents the Lord. (TLSB)

"Welcome," four times in this verse, does not speak of justification, becoming a Christian, but rather sanctification, the attitude with which we deal with others. Furthermore, it is not limited to children for verse 35 says: "Servant of *all*." Our attitude toward all, and in this instance a child, actually denotes our attitude toward the Father and the Son. And our whole attitude is indicated by our attitude toward just ONE such child. The receiving and dealing with the child is based on knowledge of and faith in what Jesus has revealed. Note again that this is open to anyone, "whoever." It is not a limitation but an invitation. (Buls)

What underlies the thought of the whole verse is that the receiver must be like the child, humble, the antithesis to pride and arrogance. Is the verse best translated: "Not only Me but also the One who sent Me" or "Not Me but the One who sent Me." ? Lenski, Beck, Hendriksen and the Peschitto prefer the first. The other translations prefer the second. (Buls)

Suggestion: What is overlooked in this argument is that Jesus Himself is the greatest example of humility. He humbly did what He did to have us deal directly with the Father in heaven. This does not mean that He is downgrading His necessary Mediator role. Not at all. The truly humble person does not downgrade the importance of what he is doing or what he is. (Buls)

Stoeckhardt: The disciples, of course, were repentant and were of the true faith but thought too highly of themselves and therefore they had to take care that they would not lose the faith and the Kingdom through pride and arrogance. And so it behooves all believers, who still have the proud flesh, to be admonished to repent and to become as little children, small and humble in their own estimation, as simple and modest as children. Above all, before God we should be truly humble but also should make ourselves subject to each other, each one be servant of the next person. (Buls)

hen tōn toioutōn paidiōn, "one such child." In Matthew's parallel, an additional verse is added (Mt 18:4), in which Jesus offers the child as an example of humility and greatness in the kingdom. Here in Mark, the child is an apt illustration of one to receive because the child cannot repay. One gains no earthly recognition by receiving a child. The chief point, though, is receiving "in my [Jesus'] name" (*epi tōi onomati mou*). Receiving anyone of any age in Jesus' name is an act of faith in the Savior. One who has faith in Christ is great. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

9:33–37 Confused by Jesus' prediction of His death, the disciples return to a subject they know well, their own greatness. Jesus shows them that true status is found in serving those whom God values. When we are tempted to debate who is the greatest, we should instead look to where the Master hangs on the cross. He represents us before the Father in order to redeem us, and He leads us by the cross into a new life. • Lord, forgive us for our battles over greatness. Remind us that You alone are great, for You have served the least among us. Amen. (TLSB)