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Sunday Mass Study Notes for 09-29-2024



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This week we start with some history and context of the first reading from the Book of Numbers. Then we continue with the study from James and conclude with the Gospel lesson in which Jesus addresses spiritual pride and the danger of sin.

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Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the first reading from Numbers is that Moses' father in-law Jethro had earlier approached Moses about setting up judges to help with the administration of disputes just after the Hebrews had fled from Egypt (Exodus 18:22). Next, Moses received the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai and the Hebrews left Mt. Sinai to begin their first (and unsuccessful) approach into the Promised Land. They complained to Moses about their food as they became very tired of eating manna day after day (Numbers 10:12-13, 11:1). Moses was so overwhelmed that he cried out to God for help (Numbers 11:10-15). The LORD's solution was twofold. First, He promised to send them meat, and second, He told Moses to appoint seventy elders who would help him carry his responsibilities (Numbers 11:16-18). Our reading today picks up with the consecration ceremony of the elders. Be careful to note the use of capitalization of the pronouns in verse 25 as referring either to God or to Moses.

First Reading:

> *Numbers 11:25-29 NAS95 25 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him; and He took of the Spirit who was upon him and placed Him upon the seventy elders. And when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do it again. 26 But two men had remained in the camp; the name of one was Eldad and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them (now they were among those who had been registered, but had not gone out to the tent), and they prophesied in the camp. 27 So a young man ran and told Moses and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." 28 Then Joshua the son of Nun, the attendant of Moses from his youth, said, "Moses, my lord, restrain them." 29 But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD'S people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!"*

This passage tells the story of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit of the elders to speak the Words of God (prophecy). Even though two of them (Eldad and Medad) were not in the Tent of Meeting during the commissioning ceremony, they still received the Spirit which enabled them to prophesy in the camp among the Hebrew people. Instead of restraining them after it was discovered that they were prophesying although they had not been at the formal ceremony, Moses taught them a valuable lesson. Moses said, in essence, "I wish everyone was so filled with the Spirit that each person would prophecy like this" (v. 29b).

There are two lessons from this passage for us today. First, we learned from Moses what humility and leadership look like. Instead of hoarding God's power, Moses celebrated the distribution of God's power to others. Second, in spite of the disobedience of the two elders, God still used them to minister to the people. Note that the text never mentioned the works of the sixty-eight faithful elders. God's first choice is to use His faithful people to accomplish His works, but he will use others as well. God can use sinful people to accomplish His greater purposes, and this reveals His grace.

Later in the Gospel lesson, we will see how Jesus taught His disciples a very similar lesson as to what Moses told Joshua. In the meantime, we will move to the second reading from James in which he discusses the reality of judgment and hell for nonbelievers. This is also something that Jesus will also discuss in the Gospel reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is a continuation of the study from James but skips ahead to chapter 5 from where we left off last week at James 4:3. The intervening verses covered a variety of subjects but were primarily about pride. This week's reading is a brief departure from the instructions to believers and is instead a warning to the unbelieving rich. In biblical times, there was no such thing as a middle class. A possible exception to this was the few shopkeepers the existed in the cities and even they owned very little property making them subservient to the rich property owners. Wealth in those days was distributed mostly to the super rich and the rest of the people struggled for survival. It wasn't until the 19'th century that these wage gaps began to slowly disappear. James would have written just two decades before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans who saw to it that the possessions of the rich were stolen, the rest reduced to rubble, and all the Jews were evicted from the city. James, as the leader of the Jerusalem church, would have known the Lord's prediction about the coming destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (Matthew 24:2). Perhaps the tenor of the people's relationship with the Roman government was moving in that direction. It is evident from the reading that James also had a telescopic view in mind like how Isaiah writes with near and far term fulfillments stacked on top of one another. Although the near term fulfillment of James' warning to the rich would have happened with the destruction of Jerusalem, the ultimate fulfillment was as in Jesus' story of Lazarus and the rich man, when the wealthy man died and stood before the Lord in judgment. As you read, keep in mind both of these upcoming judgments.

Second Reading:

> *James 5:1-6 NAS95 1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. 2 Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! 4 Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. 5 You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.*

James' focus in the reading is upon the eternal judgment coming from God after the unbelieving rich person dies. He says that the rust of their golden and silver treasures bears witness against them. Also crying out against them during this terrible day of judgment is the laborers whom they exploited during their lifetimes and whom they "condemned and put to death" (v. 6a). Even those in what we may consider the middle class, people like the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick makers were taking advantage of by the rich in this polar society with two social classes – the very rich and everyone else. Yet we know that around two decades later there was also an earthly judgment that happened to everyone in Jerusalem, not just the rich. This was a judgment in the sense that it was against the Jews for rebelling against Roman authority, and God says that no authority exists unless He ordains it (Romans 13:1).

The unbelieving rich people to whom James addressed this writing would have done well to listen to his warning. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus described in grim detail the conditions in Jerusalem during the Roman siege in the days leading up to the destruction of the temple and city in AD 70. During the three-year blockade, the distinctions between the social classes were obliterated and all of the people were reduced to plundering and stealing to find food. Josephus wrote that cannibalism was commonplace, and "Tufts of withered grass were devoured, and sold in little bundles for four drachmas" (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews Book II*). Yet, although we could say that James' prophecy about the "miseries which [were] coming upon [them]" (v. 1) Was fulfilled in the physical sense in AD 70, the ultimate terror was yet to come when the non-believing people died and stood in judgment before the Lord when they died.

We can be profoundly happy that although we will stand to account before the Lord for what we did with what He gave us, we will not suffer with any miseries that will come upon us when we die (v. 1). This doesn't mean that since we are relatively rich compared to people in the early church that we don't have to be good stewards of the things that God has entrusted to us. We must recognize the great responsibility that God has entrusted us since we are comparatively rich compared to the early readers of James' Letter. In contrast to the rich person who will have nothing when they die, we

have now and will possess even greater riches from God after we die. Saint John said, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may **know** that you have eternal life" 1 John 5:13, emphasis added. It is not a sin to know that we have eternal life with our Lord Jesus. Saint Paul said, "but just as it is written, 'THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM'" (1 Corinthians 2:9). So even if we are poor, we can trust that we are rich in spirit.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is a continuation of the study from Saint Mark. The context is just after the disciples were arguing about whom among them was the greatest (Mark 9:34). Afterwards, Jesus taught them that the way to be great was to become a servant (Mark 9:35), and provided an object lesson to them by setting a child before them and saying, "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me" (Mark 9:37). This illustration revealed someone (the child) who needed to be served, but was unable to serve in return. In the same way, Jesus calls us to serve even if we are unable to pay him or her back. As you read, keep this context in mind of Jesus' call to achieve greatness by being a servant.

Gospel Reading:

Note: Verses 44 and 46 which were omitted from the reading have been included below.

> *Mark 9:38-48 NAS95 38 John said to Him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us." 39 But Jesus said, "Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. 40 For he who is not against us is for us. 41 For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward. 42 Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea. 43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, 44 where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED. 45 If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell, 46 where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT*

> *QUENCHED. 47 If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell, 48 where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.*

In the opening of the reading, Jesus answered the objection of His disciples about someone they saw casing out demons in His name. From the context, it is clear that Jesus was continuing His teaching on the matter of spiritual pride as He had just finished teaching them about this through His illustration with the child. Jesus told His disciples that they should humble themselves and in essence be glad that others were serving Him and accomplishing good works in His name. Next, Jesus taught His disciples about how great a sin it was to cause another person to sin as well as the reality of hell. There are degrees of punishment in hell and Jesus is warning them that any non-believer who leads others deeper into their non-believing, sinful state will suffer the worst eternal punishment in hell. Jesus used a hyperbole of the hand, foot and eye to illustrate the danger of sin in the life of a believer. The hand refers to the things we do (v. 43a). The foot refers to the places we go (v. 45a). The eye refers to the things we see (v. 47a). Jesus is using exaggeration to say that believers should take radical actions to deal with the sin in their lives. Some people have taken literal actions against themselves, including the church Father Origen of Alexandria, who emasculated himself in order to deal with his problem of lust. He doesn't mean that we should physically cut off the body part which brought the sin on, but rather take drastic actions to see that we don't continue in the sinful pattern.

What are some practical applications we can take away from the lesson today? First, one of the primary ministries that we have as believers is to tell the world about the danger of sin and the need to turn from their sin and place their faith in the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of their sin. God calls us to remember that the first message that Jesus brought when He began His ministry was the call to repent. Jesus picked up where John the Baptist left off who said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). This could mean coming alongside someone who you know is leading others into sin as there is a multiplying effect that their sinful actions are bringing upon the world. The greatest sinners in the world tend to become the greatest evangelists after they come to faith in Christ. Jesus said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). Sin when left unchecked in the life of a nonbeliever will eventually lead them to an eternity in hell, and they need to be told about this fact.

Second, all of us need to keep an eye on our spiritual pride. Jesus went to great lengths to caution people about the danger of sin in the life of a believer, the foremost of which is pride. Just after the disciples finished arguing about who was the greatest among them, Jesus had to calm their objections about someone who was doing good works in His name. Pride is hard to see in ourselves, but oftentimes easy to see in others.

We can develop many practical ways to safeguard ourselves from runaway sin. One way that I have found it helpful is to develop a relationship with a believer of the same gender to share prayer requests and to hold each other accountable for the things going on in their lives. A realistic schedule could be to agree to meet for one hour a month to meet face-to-face, talk to each other at least once a week by phone or email, and pray for each other each day. In this way, it is harder for sinful patterns to develop unchecked without any feedback from another believer.

Reflection Questions

1. In biblical times, the rich were the primary nemesis of the working poor. James comforted the believers by reminding them of the judgment that was to come upon the rich and that their abusers were actually **spiritually** poor. In our day, we are relatively rich compared to the first century Christians and have to refine how we view the "rich" as discussed by James. Who are the "rich" people who oppress you? How does knowing that you are spiritually rich help you to mentally overcome these oppressors in your life?

2. Ask yourself the following question. Have you ever developed a relationship with another believer in which you have been able to share personal and spiritual matters? If your answer is no, or if you are no longer meeting with this person, pray that God would place someone in your life with whom you could meet and know that someone was praying for you each day.

Sunday Mass Study Notes for 09-26-2021

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In the opening of the reading Jesus answered the objection of His disciples about someone they saw casing out demons in His name. From the context, it is clear that Jesus was continuing His teaching on the matter of spiritual pride as He had just finished teaching them about this through His illustration with the child. Jesus told His disciples that they should humble themselves and in essence be glad that others were serving Him and accomplishing good works in His name. Next, Jesus taught His disciples about how great a sin it was to cause another person to sin as well as the reality of hell. There are degrees of punishment in hell and Jesus is warning them that any nonbeliever who leads others deeper into their nonbelieving, sinful state will suffer the worst eternal punishment in hell. Jesus used a hyperbole of the hand, foot and eye to illustrate the danger of sin in the life of a believer. The hand refers to the things we do (v. 43a). The foot refers to the places we go (v. 45a). The eye refers to the things we see (v. 47a). Jesus is using exaggeration to say that believers should take radical actions to deal with the sin in their lives. Some people have taken literal actions against themselves, including the church Father Origen of Alexandria who emasculated himself in order to deal with his problem of lust. He doesn't mean that we should physically cut off the body part which brought the sin about, but rather take drastic actions to see that we don't continue in the sinful pattern.

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Keywords: Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Lectionary 137

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 09-30-2018

Study Notes for the Sunday Mass Published by Christians for Christ Ministries. We are a non-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to encourage and facilitate Christians in studying the Holy Scriptures. **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus."** 1 Timothy 2:5



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. Over the years, I began to keep in my computer a folder in which I filed obituaries and death notices. As I am getting a bit "long in the tooth" myself, this folder has been growing larger and larger. From time to time, I look through this folder and contemplate the lives of all the people who have passed away that I have known. To be truthful the ones I really think about are the people who I am not sure trusted in the Lord Jesus as their savior. Some of the people listed in this folder are ones who I prayed for over the course of a decade or more. As I think about these people I remember all that Jesus said about hell, and how anyone that does not trust in Him will spend eternity in that awful place. I am very glad for those precious few people listed in my folder whom I knew had trusted in the Lord Jesus. This week we will learn some things that Jesus said about hell. We will see how even Jesus' own disciples got distracted through their own spiritual pride which kept them from proclaiming the message that Jesus gave them, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

This week we start with some history and context about the first reading from the Book of Numbers. Then we continue with the study from James and conclude with the Gospel lesson in which Jesus addresses spiritual pride and the danger of sin.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the first reading from Numbers is that Moses' father in-law Jethro had earlier approached Moses about setting up judges to help with the administration of disputes just after the Hebrews had fled from Egypt (Exodus 18:22). Next, Moses received the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai and the Hebrews left Mt. Sinai to begin their first (and unsuccessful) approach into the Promised Land. They complained to Moses about their food as they became very tired of eating manna day after day (Numbers 10:12-13, 11:1). Moses was so overwhelmed that he cried out to God

for help (Numbers 11:10-15). The LORD's solution was twofold. First, He promised to send them meat, and second He told Moses to appoint seventy elders who would help him carry his responsibilities (Numbers 11:16-18). Our reading today picks up with the consecration ceremony of the elders. Be careful to note the use of capitalization of the pronouns in verse 25 as referring either to God or to Moses.

First Reading:

Numbers 11:25-29 NAS95 25 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him; and He took of the Spirit who was upon him and placed Him upon the seventy elders. And when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do it again. 26 But two men had remained in the camp; the name of one was Eldad and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them (now they were among those who had been registered, but had not gone out to the tent), and they prophesied in the camp. 27 So a young man ran and told Moses and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." 28 Then Joshua the son of Nun, the attendant of Moses from his youth, said, "Moses, my lord, restrain them." 29 But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD'S people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!"

This passage tells the story of the empowerment by the Holy Spirit of the elders to speak the Words of God (prophecy). Even though two of them (Eldad and Medad) were not at the Tent of Meeting during the commissioning ceremony, they still received the Spirit which enabled them to prophecy in the camp among the Hebrew people. Instead of restraining them after it was discovered that they were prophesying although they had not been at the formal ceremony, Moses taught them a valuable lesson. Moses said in essence, "I wish everyone was so filled with the Spirit that each person would prophecy like this" (v. 29b).

There are two lessons from this passage for us today. First, we learned from Moses what humility and leadership look like. Instead of hoarding God's power, Moses celebrated the distribution of God's power to others. Second, in spite of the disobedience of the two elders, God still used them to minister to the people. Note that the text never mentioned the works of the sixty-eight faithful elders. God's first choice is to use His faithful people to accomplish His works, but he will use others as well. God can use sinful people to accomplish His greater purposes, and this reveals His grace.

Later in the Gospel lesson, we will see how Jesus taught His disciples a very similar lesson as to what Moses told Joshua. In the meantime, we will move to the second reading from James in which he discusses the reality of judgment and hell for nonbelievers. This is also something that Jesus will also discuss in the Gospel reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is a continuation of the study from James but skips ahead to chapter 5 from where we left off last week at James 4:3. The intervening verses covered a variety of subjects but were primarily about pride. This week's reading is a brief departure from the instructions to believers and is instead a warning to the unbelieving rich. In biblical times, there was no such thing

as a middle class. A possible exception to this was the few shopkeepers the existed in the cities and even they owned very little property making them subservient to the rich property owners. Wealth in those days was distributed mostly to the super rich and the rest of the people struggled for survival. It wasn't until the 19'th century that these wage gaps began to slowly disappear. James would have written just two decades before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans who saw to it that the possessions of the rich were stolen, the rest reduced to rubble, and all the Jews were evicted from the city. James, as the leader of the Jerusalem church, would have known the Lord's prediction about the coming destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (Matthew 24:2). Perhaps the tenor of the people's relationship to the Roman government was moving in that direction. It is evident from the reading that James also had a telescopic view in mind like how Isaiah writes with near and far term fulfillments stacked on top of one another. Although the near term fulfillment of James' warning to the rich would have happened with the destruction of Jerusalem, the ultimate fulfillment was as in Jesus story of Lazarus and the rich man, when the wealthy man died and stood before the Lord in judgment. As you read, keep in mind both of these upcoming judgments.

Second Reading:

James 5:1-6 NAS95 1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. 2 Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! 4 Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. 5 You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.

James' focus in the reading is upon the eternal judgment coming from God after the unbelieving rich person dies. He says that the rust of their golden and silver treasures bear witness against them. Also crying out against them during this terrible day of judgment is the laborers whom they exploited during their lifetimes and whom they "condemned and put to death" (v. 6a). Even those in what we may consider the middle class, people like the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick makers were being taken advantage of by the rich in this polar society with two social classes – the very rich and everyone else. Yet we know that around two decades later there was also an earthly judgment that happened to everyone in Jerusalem, not just the rich. This was a judgment in the sense that it was against the Jews for rebelling against Roman authority, and God says that no authority exists unless He ordains it (Romans 13:1).

The unbelieving rich people to whom James addressed this writing would have done well to listen to his warning. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus described in grim detail the conditions in Jerusalem during the Roman siege in the days leading up to the destruction of the temple and city in AD 70. During the three-year blockade, the distinctions between the social classes were obliterated and all of the people were reduced to plundering and stealing to find food. Josephus wrote that cannibalism was commonplace, and "Tufts of withered grass were devoured, and sold in little

bundles for four drachmas" (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews Book II*). Yet although we could say that James' prophecy about the "miseries which [were] coming upon [them]" (v. 1) was fulfilled in the physical sense in AD 70, the ultimate terror was yet to come when the non-believing people died and stood in judgment before the Lord when they died.

We can be profoundly happy that although we will stand to account before the Lord for what we did with what He gave us, we will not suffer with any miseries that will come upon us when we die (v. 1). This doesn't mean that since we are relatively rich compared to people in the early church that we don't have to be good stewards of the things that God has entrusted to us. We must recognize the great responsibility that God has entrusted us since we are comparatively rich compared to the early readers of James' Letter. In contrast to the rich person who will have nothing when they die, we have now and will possess even greater riches from God after we die. Saint John said, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may **know** that you have eternal life" 1 John 5:13, emphasis added. It is not a sin to know that we have eternal life with our Lord Jesus. Saint Paul said, "but just as it is written, 'THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM'" (1 Corinthians 2:9). So even if we are poor, we can trust that we are rich in spirit.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is a continuation of the study from Saint Mark. The context is just after the disciples were arguing about whom among them was the greatest (Mark 9:34). Afterwards Jesus taught them that the way to be great was to become a servant (Mark 9:35), and provided an object lesson to them by setting a child before them and saying, "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me" (Mark 9:37). This illustration revealed someone (the child) who needed to be served, but was unable to serve in return. In the same way, Jesus calls us to serve even if we are unable to pay him or her back. As you read, keep this context in mind of Jesus' call to achieve greatness by being a servant.

Gospel Reading:

Note: Verses 44 and 46 which were omitted from the reading have been included below.

Mark 9:38-48 NAS95 38 John said to Him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us." 39 But Jesus said, "Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. 40 For he who is not against us is for us. 41 For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward. 42 Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea. 43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two

hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, 44 where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED. 45 If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell, 46 where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED. 47 If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell, 48 where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.

In the opening of the reading Jesus answered the objection of His disciples about someone they saw casing out demons in His name. From the context, it is clear that Jesus was continuing His teaching on the matter of spiritual pride as He had just finished teaching them about this through His illustration with the child. Jesus told His disciples that they should humble themselves and in essence be glad that others were serving Him and accomplishing good works in His name. Next, Jesus taught His disciples about how great a sin it was to cause another person to sin as well as the reality of hell. There are degrees of punishment in hell and Jesus is warning them that any nonbeliever who leads others deeper into their nonbelieving, sinful state will suffer the worst eternal punishment in hell. Jesus used a hyperbole of the hand, foot and eye to illustrate the danger of sin in the life of a believer. The hand refers to the things we do (v. 43a). The foot refers to the places we go (v. 45a). The eye refers to the things we see (v. 47a). Jesus is using exaggeration to say that believers should take radical actions to deal with the sin in their lives. Some people have taken literal actions against themselves, including the church Father Origen of Alexandria who emasculated himself in order to deal with his problem of lust. He doesn't mean that we should physically cut off the body part which brought the sin about, but rather take drastic actions to see that we don't continue in the sinful pattern.

What are some practical applications we can take away from the lesson today? First, one of the primary ministries that we have as believers is to tell the world about the danger of sin and the need to turn from their sin and place their faith in the Lord Jesus for forgiveness of their sin. God calls us to remember that the first message that Jesus brought when He began His ministry was the call to repent. Jesus picked up where John the Baptist left off who said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). This could mean coming alongside someone who you know is leading others into sin as there is a multiplying effect that their sinful actions are bringing upon the world. The greatest sinners in the world tend to become the greatest evangelists after they come to faith in Christ. Jesus said, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). Sin when left unchecked in the life of a nonbeliever will eventually lead them to an eternity in hell, and they need to be told about this fact.

Second, all of us need to keep an eye on our spiritual pride. Jesus went to great lengths to caution people about the danger of sin in the life of a believer, the foremost of which is pride. Just after the disciples finished arguing about who was the greatest among them, Jesus had to calm their objections about someone who was doing good works in His name. Pride is hard to see in ourselves, but oftentimes easy to see in others.

We can develop many practical ways to safeguard ourselves from runaway sin. One way that I have

found it helpful is to develop a relationship with a believer of the same gender to share prayer requests and to hold each other accountable for the things going on in their lives. A realistic schedule could be to agree to meet for one hour a month to meet face-to-face, talk to each other at least once a week by phone or email, and pray for each other each day. In this way, it is harder for sinful patterns to develop unchecked without any feedback from another believer.

Reflection Questions

1. In biblical times, the rich were the primary nemesis of the working poor. James comforted the believers by reminding them of the judgment that was to come upon the rich and that their abusers were actually **spiritually** poor. In our day, we are relatively rich compared to the first century Christians and have to refine how we view the "rich" as discussed by James. Who are the "rich" people who oppress you? How does knowing that you are spiritually rich help you to mentally overcome these oppressors in your life?

2. Ask yourself the following question. Have you ever developed a relationship with another believer in which you have been able to share personal and spiritual matters? If your answer is no, or if you are no longer meeting with this person, pray that God would place someone in your life with whom you could meet and know that someone was praying for you each day.

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