



To Look After James 1:27

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to James 1. We, obviously, don't have time this morning for an in-depth look at a passage of Scripture. I don't even think I could do a verse of Scripture in the time we have this morning, so we're going to do a word. We're going to look at one word this morning; it's in James 1:27.

The context here is the book of James. This is a very practical picture of Christianity: Faith in action. And it's the end of the introduction here and basically, what James has said, especially, in verses 22-27 is that religion, true religion, is not just a monotonous routine of superficial acts. True religion is not even just hearing truths. True religion is not participating in religious activity. True religion is a genuine expression of the truth and love and justice of God. And he comes to verse 27, and he says this, *"Religion that God our Father accepts..."* That kind of statement draws your attention. *"This is the kind of religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless: To look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."*

Here's the word I want you to think about with me this morning. It's right in the middle of verse 27. *"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this..."* It's a verb: *"to look after."* You might circle it there in your Bible. *"To look after."* It's a really interesting word. In the original language of the New Testament, it's used eleven different times here, in addition to a variety of other times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. And basically, it's a word that means to visit someone, to go to someone or to look out for someone. And it's the kind of visit, not just, "I'm going to visit somebody and then go be on my way", but it's to visit somebody to care for them. It's a visiting to somebody to take responsibility for their needs, to go to them and to take responsibility for them.

It's a religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: To go to orphans and widows, and not just visit them, but to take ownership and responsibility for their needs. To go to them with deep concern. That's the kind of religion that our God and Father accepts.

I want to take you on a little tour just to give you a little glimpse into the richness of this word in a way that I hope will give us a picture of what this verse means. I want you turn back all the way to the book of Genesis, the first book in the Bible, Genesis 50. First book, last chapter: Genesis 50. And you might, as we go to these different places, you might circle every time I show you this word. This is what I do in my Bible study. I'll circle...if I'm looking at a word like this...circle it, and then put a little note out to the side that says, "James 1:27". It reminds you when you read this later on in your Bible study that this is the same word that's used over here in James 1:27 that says how we're supposed to look after orphans.

Look at Genesis 50:24. This is the end of Genesis. It's Joseph about to die, and he says to his brothers, *"I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid..."* There's the word; circle it. "Come to your aid." Same word that's used in James 1:27 translated there. *"Look*

after." He "will come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, 'God will surely...' Here it is again a second time, "...come to your aid." Circle it there. "...come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place." What Joseph is saying is that he, the last in this picture of incredible characters who followed God in the book of Genesis...he's about to die. And they're about to wonder what's going to happen next. And he says, "God's going to come to you. He's going to look after you. He's going to take responsibility for your needs. He is going to care for you with a deep concern." That's the picture of Genesis 50:24-25. This is what God does with His people.

Let me show you that again in the very middle of the Old Testament. Go to the book of Psalms, Psalm 8. Let me show you one near the beginning of Psalms and one near the end of Psalms. Look at Psalm 8. Again, this is talking about the character of God when it used this word, "To look after." Look at Psalm 8. The word is in verse 4. We'll start in verse 3 just to make sure we have the context. Listen to Psalm 8:3. "*When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you...*" Here it is, "...care for...?" Circle it there. "...care for him?" You look at after him. God, in His greatness and yet, He looks after us. He comes to visit us and show deep concern for us.

Same picture over in Psalm 106. Go near the end of Psalms, Psalm 106. Look with me at verse 4 there. We'll start in verse 2, just to make sure we get the context. This is talking about the greatness of God and the salvation He brings to His people much like Psalm 8. And listen to what it says there. Psalm 106, we'll start in verse 2. "*Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the LORD or fully declare his praise? Blessed are they who maintain justice, who constantly do what is right.*" Verse 4, "*Remember me, O LORD, when you show favor to your people, come to my aid...*" Circle it there. Literally, "Look after me when you save them." This is the Psalm that's crying out for God to look after him when He saves His people.

And so in the Old Testament, what we've got is a picture of God, a God who looks after His people, who visits them. He comes to them in their time of need and He takes responsibility for meeting their needs. And when you get to the New Testament...go ahead and be turning to Luke 1...what happens is in the New Testament, Luke uses this word more than anybody else combined. And what I want you to see in Luke and Acts is the way Luke uses this term. Picks up on it from the Old Testament, this picture of God caring for His people and see how he transitions it to also talk about how we look after each other.

Listen to Luke 1:68. This is Zechariah giving praise to God, and he says this in Luke 1:68: "*Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel because he has come...*" That's the word right there; circle it. "...he has come and has redeemed his people." Literally, "He has looked after His people. He has visited them to redeem them." You see the same thing down in verse 78, same chapter; Luke 1:78. "...because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven." That word, "come to us" is the same word that's used in James 1:27. Circle it, kind of make the note. "His mercy will visit us. His mercy will look out for us."

Now, go over to Luke 7. I want you to see how this word is used to describe God through Jesus. Listen to this in Luke 7. Look with me at verse 16. This is the crowds responding to Jesus. Listen to what they say. It says in Luke 7:16, "*They were all filled with awe and praised God. 'A great prophet has appeared among us...'*" They're talking about Jesus. They said, "God has come to help His people." Those words, "has come to help," that's actually only one word in the original language of the New Testament, and it's this word, "He's

looked after us. He has come to us to help us." So circle that. He's come to help His people. Let me show you just a couple more in Luke.

Luke wrote another volume called the book of Acts. Go with me past John to the right. Go to Acts 7. Some of you are wondering where this is going. Just get the picture. We're going to think in just a second about the practical implications here, but I want you to get the richness of what Scripture is teaching in just this one word about the character of God displayed in His people. Look at Acts 7:23. This is one of my favorites. This is Steven before the Sanhedrin. He's recounting the history of the Old Testament. He's talking about Moses.

Remember, Moses grew up in the Egyptian palace, and then he left, and he was all on his own, and he was able...could have had this chance to live out his life however he wanted to, but instead, he went back to Egypt to help save the Israelites, to help bring the Israelites who were slaves in Egypt out of Egypt. He went back at great risk. Why? Listen to Acts 7:23. Steven says, *"When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites..."* The word there, "to visit", same word that's in James 1:27.

Now, think about the thickness of that verse. He didn't just decide to go visit and say, "Hello" and spend a little holiday vacation there, and then go back where he came from. Instead, he went to them to care for them. He knew that he belonged to the Israelites. They belonged to him. He shared a common destiny with them. And so, he took responsibility for these people, and he went to be with them and to show great concern for them.

Go over to Acts 15. You see a very similar thing expressed in the New Testament church. It's the last one in the book of Acts, and I'll show you one more. Look at Acts 15:36. And the words actually are also used in verse 14 of this chapter, talking about God's concern, but I want you to see verse 36. *"Some time later Paul said to Barnabas..."* Now, remember, Paul and Barnabas had been going and planting churches in all kinds of different places and leading people to Christ. *"Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us go back and visit..."* There it is. There's the word. Circle it: "visit." Same word in James 1:27. *"...the brothers in all the towns where we preach the word of the Lord and see how they are doing."* Again, Paul says to Barnabas, "Let's go see these guys, but not just go see them to say, 'Hello'. These are people we have led to Christ. These are churches we started. We need to go and help them. We need to go show concern for them. We need to take responsibility for them. We need to see how they're doing."

Let me show you one more: Matthew 25. And this is where we'll land. Matthew 25. And we'll start in verse 31. The word is actually found down in verse 36, "to look after". Look with me at Matthew 25:31 and let these words of Jesus soak in. *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him..."* Verse 31,

"...he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

"Then, the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick [And here it is] and you looked after me. [Circle it there.] I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"The righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'"

"And the King will reply, 'I tell you truth, whatever you did for one and the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'"

What I want you to see here is that Jesus takes this word, "to visit someone, to come to them, to look after them, to care for them and take responsibility for them" and He says, "When you do that for the sick, when you look after the sick, and you look after the poor and the hungry and those in prison, you are looking after me." What a huge statement that Jesus would identify Himself with the sick and the hungry and the poor. What's interesting about this word is that it also has antonyms, opposites and the opposite of "to look after someone" is "to forget someone", to willfully or completely forget, to neglect.

I want you to realize what this one word in the New Testament is teaching us. This one word is teaching us that God is apparently very concerned in His own character about looking after His people and coming to His people and caring for them. And He's saying that religion that's true is religion that goes to the neediest, the orphans and the widows, and cares for them. And the opposite of true religion is religion that forgets and neglects those who are needy and forgets and neglects sick and the hungry and the poor and the orphans and the widows.

And it all begs the question, "Do we as a church today have true religion or false religion?" We have heard numbers today that are astounding, to say the least. Forty million people with HIV/AIDS; 40 million. Two-and-a-half million of them are children, and that number is actually increasing dramatically. Last year alone, half a million kids in the world contracted HIV/AIDS. And that's just the children with HIV/AIDS. We've heard today about the indirect effects of HIV/AIDS. Fifteen million kids that are orphaned without a mom or dad or both as a result of HIV/AIDS; fifteen million. You realize that means for every face you saw up here the last few minutes, they represent a million kids who have no mother or father as a result of HIV/AIDS.

You hear numbers like that, and you almost don't even know how to begin wrapping your mind and your heart around them. So, let's try to bring this into this room. Let me ask every child or student, anyone 18 years old or younger...if you're 18 years old or younger in this room this morning, will you just stand up where you are? Okay. In light of those numbers, you do the math. And since we've gathered together for this worship service in the last hour, forty kids have died of HIV/AIDS. And so, let me ask this whole side, this section right here, just to go ahead and sit down; the rest of you remain standing.

In an hour alone, forty kids have died of HIV/AIDS since we sat down in the seats where we are sitting now. In that same hour, these are the kids who died of HIV/AIDS, but there are 250 other kids who, over the last hour, have been orphaned due to HIV/AIDS. And so let me invite you all and you all in these two sections to sit down. And in one hour, these are the only kids in this room who would either be alive or have both parents still living. You guys can have a seat.

Now, what if it were these kids? What if were these students and children here who, in this hour, were dying of HIV/AIDS, or these who were losing their parents? Would we do something about that? Would we do something to help them? No question we would. "Of course, we would, David." Why? Why would we do something for them? Because we know

them. Because we see their faces, and we know their names. They're right in front of us. Then, why do we not do for these millions of other kids? Because we've chosen not to see their faces and get to know their names. And because we have this extremely dangerous tendency in the church to look at those numbers and say, "They are not our responsibility" and that is false religion at the core.

True religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: To look after, to go to orphans and widows, and not just to go be with them, but to take responsibility for their needs and to care for them. They're easier to forget until you know their names, until you see their faces. I remember even in our own adoption journey when we didn't know who or where our child might be, wondering through that process, wondering what was going on. And then as soon as we saw a picture and had a name, everything changed and your heart was turned upside down, and you were running to the airplane to get there. They're easier to forget until you know their names, until you see their faces. This is why we must be a church that says, "We will do everything we do here for the sake of God's glory over there, because they are our responsibility in the church. They are our responsibility in the church."

You know what Jesus is saying in Matthew 25? He is saying that they are Jesus. What a huge statement. "What do you mean they're Jesus? I thought we were supposed to go and be Jesus to them. I thought we were Jesus' hands and feet." Yes, in a sense, that is definitely true all over Scripture but listen to what Jesus is saying in Matthew 25. He says, "When you help the sick, the poor, and the orphan, it's me you're helping." What that means is if the church wants to be with Jesus, then that's exactly where we'll be. If the church lives according to the needs that are right in front of our faces day in and day out, then we will miss out on where Jesus is around the world. And if we want to be where Jesus is, then we must rise up and be a church that says, "We will sacrifice everything to make the glory of Christ known in Birmingham and in the middle of sub-Saharan Africa, countries that are ravaged by HIV/AIDS, homes and families, individual children that are ravaged by HIV/AIDS. We will be the church to them, and we will encounter Jesus there. And we will give Him great glory in the process.

And that's what we've been talking about this entire month. And I pray...I pray, because I don't know all of how this looks as the church, but I'm tired of ignoring the questions that we need to wrestle with, and I'm tired of leaving those questions to the side and going on with business as usual. We are rising up and taking those questions and wrestling with them. How is The Church at Brook Hills going to impact these kids and the kids that are represented by the faces we've seen this morning? And I praise God for that is happening.

In some ways, all across this faith family, I know there are families right now who are overseas adopting. There are numerous families that have adopted. There is Lifeline and Reach Orphans with Hope and the people who work for Compassion and Servant Life and these different pictures. How can we do this? How can we be extensions of the church around the world? And what we're saying as a faith family this month is we're going to rise up and really take this seriously, and we're going to say that the world is our responsibility and making the gospel and glory of Jesus Christ known to them is going to be the reason for which we gathered together, the reason for which we scatter apart. It's all going to be driven by passion to make His glory known in all nations.

And I pray that God will give us wisdom as a faith family for how that looks. And I pray that God will give us great wisdom as individuals and families across this room for how that looks. And so, I'd like to do exactly that. I'd like us to pray. And I'm going to ask Steven to come up and to play in the background this morning. And I just want us to pray.

We do a lot of things, a lot of different times. We're just going to come before God over the next few minutes, and I'm going to ask you all across the room to get in groups of two, three, four, five, maybe as family units or a couple of families together; whatever is best, and I don't want you to feel uncomfortable. If you don't feel comfortable praying out loud, that's fine. You don't have to do that. don't feel the pressure to do that, but I do want us, as a faith family, to gather together across this room, either where you are, or I invite you, if you'd like, to come together to kneel...families, groups...to come and just to kneel all across the front and us just to, for the next few minutes, let's call out to God on behalf of the children that these faces represent. And let's call out to God on behalf of this church, that God would show us, as His church, what it looks like for us to put this mission into action. Let's call out to Him and ask Him to give us the nations and do it in such a way that He gets great glory through us. And let's ask Him to give us wisdom for how that looks.

So, you gather together in groups of two, three, four, five...whatever it is...around this room, and for the next few minutes, we're going to pray. And you can come to the front, if you'd like. Steven's just going to play over us, and then we'll close out our time together.

Father, we praise you because you're our Father. You are the Father to the fatherless and the Defender of the widow. We praise you for your great and glorious character, and for you in your might and majesty also having the grace to come and visit us to be with us to take responsibility for our needs, to look after us as your people. Oh, glory be your name. God, thank you for looking after us. Thank you for saving us from our sins. Thank you for the hope that you have given to us. And God, we pray that we, as your church, would not hoard it. God, that you would keep us from being a church that sits on the beauty, majesty and glory and hope of the gospel and entertains ourselves with it. God, we pray that you make us a church that rises up and with your wisdom, with everything that we need from you, because we know that apart from you we can do nothing.

And so we pray Lord that you would take it all; you would take every facet of your church, our lives, our families, this community of faith and all that goes with it. God, that you would take this church, and you would use it to resound your fame across the earth. God, that you would give us the compassion of Jesus, that you would conform our hearts to be one with yours, to feel what you feel and to see what you see.

And God, I praise you for what you have done this month. I praise you for the people who have raised up all across this faith family and said, "I want to go and visit. I want to look after people in other contexts, God, to give my time to what you are doing around the world." And God, we pray for your blessings on that for every individual, every trip, every way that that manifests itself. God, we pray that in the coming year, that you would use this faith family to show your great glory. And God, we pray that you would give us wisdom and grace to know how we can best be a part of your plan among the millions upon millions, especially in Africa, but all around the world who are suffering from HIV/AIDS.

God, forgive us for letting Hollywood take the lead on how to reach out to some of these needs in the world. God, we repent of that. We want to be your church, and we pray that you would help us to look after orphans and widows in their distress, God. We pray that we would be found with true religion by your grace. And for those orphan by HIV/AIDS and other things around the world, I praise you for what you are doing all across this faith family and how this faith family is showing your heart in so many ways. And God, we just pray this would be the tip of the iceberg for what you use this faith family to do among orphans and the sick and the poor and the hungry in the world.

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