

The Compass

Week 47

OT Readings: Ezekiel 39:1 – Daniel 2:23

NT Readings: James 2:18 – 1 Peter 4:6

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- Much of these final chapters of Ezekiel are foreign to 21st century ears. Ezekiel is presented with a grand vision of the restoration of temple and priesthood. Several key things emerge: The return of God's presence among His people (43:1-9), the restoration of the land (47-48) and significantly, living water flowing from the renewed temple (47:1-12).¹

New Testament

- James practical wisdom continues with many "proverb-like" insights.
- Peter writes to believers in modern day northwest Turkey to encourage them as they face persecution. How does one live in the midst of this kind of suffering and difficulty? Suffering as a Christian should be no surprise, Jesus Himself suffered (1 Peter 2:21f.). These testings need not derail our faith, rather as the Father's own (1 Pet. 5:3, 17) our lives can reveal to those around the truth of what we believe (1:6-9; 3:13-16; etc.).

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

James 4:5. A paraphrase might help here, "The Spirit which He has made to live within us is filled with jealousy for us."² God, in the OT, is shown to be "jealous" for His people.³ How can such a characteristic be true of God? We tend to think of jealousy as only negative. Yet, even human jealousy is not necessarily considered always evil. Who would think much of a spouse who cares so little for their husband or wife that they are unconcerned with marital faithfulness? Indifference would speak volumes about the lack of true love and concern for other. Who would not be jealous for their wayward child when they indulge in self-destructive behaviors? It arouses in the parent the most intense kind of desire, zeal, to bring their child home to their care and concern. Jealousy need not be selfishly motivated.⁴ Jealousy certainly is appropriate in certain instances, and in fact, becomes the only proper reaction in certain circumstances.

In this context, James rebukes his readers for their "friendship" with the world; such double-mindedness makes enemies of God, spiritual adulterers (4:1-10). Such worldliness can only have negative and devastating consequences; we were never created to have life apart from wholehearted devotion to God. Like a caring parent or devoted lover, any waywardness arouses in God a zealous care and concern, a desire to reclaim us, to rescue, from the dangers to which we expose ourselves. Anything less than jealousy for us would be less than loving and wise; and so unlike God!

Application: "What about me? How does this apply?"

1 Peter 1:22 and 4:8. Jesus had a dream. That the power of His love revealed in His unparalleled sacrifice would so capture our hearts that we would *love one another*, "even as I have loved you, so love one another." So important is this that Jesus says it is **how** others know *He is authentic*. (John 13:34-35) Peter knew what it was for his love to fail, to forsake his best Friend in the moment of intense trial (John 18:25-27) and he also knew what it was to be restored to friendship again by the power of Jesus' love for him (John 21:15-19). Oh, he knew!

Such love has the power not only to change us, but to change the way we see our brothers and sisters. They too are loved by the same One who loves us so, how can we *not* love them? Peter urges his readers, who might find their hearts growing cold in the midst of great difficulty and even hatred expressed toward them by their persecutors: "whatever you do, don't quite being on fire in your love for each other!"

In our time, love is emotion or affection. Deep love and committed love for one another is something God must teach us – and He will if we will learn it (1 Thess. 4:9). Let's begin here. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if there is

any strained or broken relationship with another believer that you need to mend. Ask Him to bring to your mind another brother or sister that needs to know that you love them – and ask Him to show you how – and then do it!

Difficult Question of the Week

James 2:14-26 with Gal. 2:16 and Rom. 3:28. Q. “Does James contradict Paul?”

A superficial reading of James and of Paul might lead to such a conclusion, however, a closer look reveals their agreement, albeit their emphasis on either faith or deeds, depending on context. Often for Paul, “works” is *not* to be understood as “deeds appropriate to faith” (as James emphasizes), but as doing the Torah (OT law) as a substitute for or a distraction from a vital relationship with God.⁵ Paul is equal clear and consistent with James – if you do not live consistent with your profession, then your faith is deficient (Eph. 5:3-6). While keeping the Torah is neither here nor there, keeping the commandments of God is required (1 Cor. 7:19). True repentance always produces appropriate deeds, “they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance” (Acts 26:20).

For both, a true faith will produce a true life. These two, faith and life, are inseparably joined, one flows necessarily out of the other. Whatever one *gives* one’s self to (their faith) will always produce “fruit” appropriate to that faith. If you live supremely for self, then your selfish, self-indulgent, self-focused lifestyle will show it. If supremely for God, we all will see the result of your confidence in and love for Him – in Paul’s words, in the way you “walk” (Gal. 5:16-24).

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¹ Fee and Stuart, 202-203. Remember that God’s presence had exited the temple in Ezek. 10-11 as a sign of the people’s sin and the judgment to come and that the land had been ravaged by the Babylonians. The water imagery will be picked up by John in Revelation 22:1-5. At the end of all things God will be present with His people and their healing and restoration will be complete!

² Translation of the Greek of this passage has been debated over the centuries. The NASU marginal reading is this: “The spirit which He has made to dwell in us lusts with envy, desires to jealousy.” Context controls; in this case the issue seems to be “friendship” with the world, meaning idolatry (= spiritual adultery) and God’s reaction to it. Thus, it is God who is jealous, not wishing to share us with another.

³ Ex. 34:14, Deut. 32:16, etc.

⁴ When human characteristics are attributed to God, we call them “anthropomorphisms.” However, John Sanders may well be correct in saying that perhaps we should think about this differently: God created us in *His* image and we are no more different from in our creation than what He intended; we are in some respects “tiny, finite replicas.” Therefore, we may need to think “Theo-morphically” – we have *God’s* image and characteristics (finite of course), albeit we have used them sinfully and corrupted them.

⁵ Jews in the 1st century were not monolithic in their views. It is overstating things to say that all Jews were simply trying to attain rightness with God through keeping the law. However, for some the Torah and circumcision became the “identifying marks” of their relationship with God; perhaps such that a vital faith was missing.