Pursuing Demas

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. Amen. Demas is a name that many of you probably know, some of you may not. It's a biblical name, but yet it's not one that is relevant today. There are no Demas snodgrasses for a reason.

I'm assuming there's not going to be one either coming. There are other names that would be chosen. There's a reason for that. The demon was a faithful companion of Paul's, so he's listed throughout Scripture as being someone who walks side by side with Paul. In his closing paragraph, Colossians 4, he lists his fellow companions who were doing ministry work with him. He says, Aristarchus and Mark, Justice, and Epaphras. Then he says, Luke, the beloved physician, greets you as does Demas.

Demas was right there with Paul alongside Luke and these other faithful companions. At the end of his letter to Philemon, Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends his greetings to you as Demas. And so does Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. This was a band of brothers, it seems. Then we get to the haunting passage in 2 Timothy chapter 4. This is Paul's last letter that we have in our possession. It says, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me. He's gone to Thessalonica. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. But Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me. And what is particularly troubling about this story is that it hits so close to home as we can place ourself in Paul's position.

And it begs the question, are there people in our lives right now who outwardly profess faith, who may be actively serving in ministry, who are here when the doors are open, who are a part of your band of brothers or sisters that you do ministry with regularly, who will not be with us in due time? If that is true, what does the Bible tell us should be our response to Demas and the Demases of our lives? And it is what makes our text tonight pertinent. It's what makes it urgent for us. If you haven't done so already, you can turn there. James chapter 5. We're going to pick up in verse 19 and 20.

[3:20] It's important to note that one of James' primary objectives in writing this letter was to confront those in the assembly of believers who have a possessed false or who possessed false dead faith.

People in the assembly who had dead faith and it was not manifesting itself in outward works that prove that that faith was genuine and legit. And he is asking and aiming for his believers to examine their faith and make sure that it is real. And it should manifest itself in our works. He was deeply concerned that no one be deceived about their salvation. James would essentially ask, if you say that you believe like you should, then why do you behave like you shouldn't?

And now in this passage where we're going to be tonight, James instructs us on how to actually deal with those who have said that they believe as they should, but behave like they shouldn't.

So chapter 5, verse 19 and 20 are going to be the only two verses that we'll look at tonight. It says this, it says this, my brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

I want us very briefly to take note of five truths that James gives us in these two verses. First of which is there will be those among you who wonder.

[5:09] There will be those among you who wonder. As we saw in Paul's experience, it is not unheard of to walk side by side in ministry with someone who by all outward appearance is indistinguishable from the rest of the flock.

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Jesus himself warned us of this, Matthew 7, verse 21 and 23 through 23, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.
And on that day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?
And now will I declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. And so what are we to make of this phenomenon?
1 John 2, 19 gives us a clue and gives us an answer. It says that they went out from us, but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.
[6:18] But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. And so these two accounts here, Matthew and 1 John, tell us that there will be those that profess the name of Christ, but are not inwardly, genuinely converted, and they will prove that they are not inwardly converted, because they will not persevere.

They walk away, they leave, and they come and join us for a season, and they are indistinguishable from the flock. And then they depart from us. I've been in ministry for 18 years.
14 of those have been here at this church. And in 14 years, you inevitably see a lot of things. You see a lot of change. This graduating class of seniors were in kinder praise, formerly known as TAP, whenever I came here.
A wedding ceremony I'm going to perform next month. The groom was 10 years old. When I came. Members of my student choir are now preparing to have children.
You see friends, husbands who would never even come to church, who once opposed the faith, are now actively serving in ministry each and every week. You see beloved saints who you have to bury and do funerals for that finished well and finished faithfully.
[7:52] There's all these sweet things that you get to see when you stay in ministry in a place for an extended amount of time. But unfortunately, with that, you occasionally see heartbreaking things.

You see people walk away. I want to be very clear. I'm not talking about people leaving our church for another church. I'm not talking about people that move away.
What I'm talking about and what this passage is talking about is people who demonstrate by their actions that they are in love with this present world and they are forsaking the assembly of Christ. They have deserted the things of the Lord. If you're a senior adult in this room, there may be some faces that are popping up into your mind. There are some names that are coming back to you of people who once walked with you, who once were faithful in ministry with you, who once were a part of your Sunday school class, and then they just left.
They were in love with the present world. They no longer wanted anything to do with the things of the Lord and they never returned. What Scripture would tell us, these people are indistinguishable from true believers for a season.
[9:13] Paul couldn't tell that Demas would walk away. We don't see any indication of that and that strife. He was naming him as a faithful companion. When Jesus said that there would be one that would betray him, the disciples questioned themselves before they questioned Judas.

If you look at all these cartoon depictions of the Last Supper, Judas is off in the corner, usually kind of shady looking and side-eyeing everybody. But that's not the picture of what we see in Scripture. They thought Judas was one of them. So much so, they even questioned Judas. They questioned their own selves. He was indistinguishable. So truly, there are people who are an active part of the church, even now.
They could be leading in very visible ways, and we will not necessarily know that until they depart from us, proving that they were never really of us. So not only will there be those among us that wonder, number two, they wonder from the truth.
They wonder from the truth. What I wanted to say, but I felt was kind of poor English, is what they wonder from is the truth. They are wondering from that. My brothers, if anyone among you wonders from the truth, sure, they may walk away from relationships.
[10:33] They may walk away from serving in ministry. They may walk away from your network of people. They may cancel you on Facebook. They may leave the group chat. But what they are really wandering from is the truth.

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The word wandered or strayed comes from the Greek word planeo, from which we get our English word planet. Unlike stars, which are known to keep their place in relation to other heavenly lights, planets appear to be kind of wandering, drifting out in the night sky.
So in the same way, we notice these persons begin to drift. They're no longer anchored by anything. They're not anchored to the truth.
They begin to forsake certain things that may not make them happy or that they no longer agree with that is clearly taught in Scripture. And they make a sacrifice here.
And they kind of walk away from this little doctrine over here. And then before you know it, they are just wandering. Truth here, in this context, refers to the word of God.
[11:45] But primarily, it's talking about the gospel of salvation. This word is aletheia. We know that this is James' intention as he uses this word to specifically talk about the gospel.

Because he uses it earlier in his message or in his letter, James 1.18. It says, So we are being brought forth.
This is a metaphor for the new birth. James uses this word, I think, four out of five times to refer specifically to the gospel. We see this word in Romans 1.18 and 19.
For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.
Aletheia. So this is our first clue that he's not talking about a straying believer. One who is just stumbling in sin. But he's talking about an unbeliever.
[12:51] And the second clue is the use of the word sinner. He says, Let him know whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering. James describes this person not as a backslider but as a sinner.

And this word is used almost exclusively and possibly exclusively in the New Testament to describe those outside the kingdom of God. So a sinner then is someone without God and Christ and in need of salvation.
This is not the actions of a believer momentarily stumbling in sin. But rather an unbeliever who has rejected the gospel. I think it's important to note that it's the rejection of the gospel that will ultimately manifest itself in a lifestyle of error.
And yes, this is possible to do while someone says that they are a believer. 1 John 1 verse 6 says, So despite any outward profession of faith, those who live in open defiance of God's revelation in Scripture do not belong to him.
And ultimately, if they do not belong to him, their lifestyle will begin to reflect it eventually. We see this even in the parable of the sower. You see how the seed is sown and there are different responses and there is one true response to the gospel.
[14:34] But this is not an uncommon phenomenon. In high schoolers, for those of you that are getting ready to go off to college, some of our college students who are already there, there are those that are plugged into the rhythm and flow of student ministry.

But when they leave this place, some will wonder from the truth. It happens all the time. Despite our best efforts in having a strong, biblically-based, godly student ministry and leadership, there will be students in the ministry that walk the walk for us for a while.
They go to camp with us for a while. They go to elevate with us for a while. And then they wander. Because with freedom comes even more responsibility to, as 2 Timothy says, follow the pattern of sound words that you have heard and guard the good deposit entrusted to you.
So we see that there will be those among you that wonder. What they are wondering from is the truth. And thirdly, the consequence of wondering from truth is hell.
So my brothers, if any among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.
[15:59] Mark 8, verse 36 and 37 says, For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?

The soul is a person's most precious and priceless possession. So if we follow this progression of the verse here in James, a wandering soul leads to death.
This is not just a physical death, but this is death of the soul in the form of eternal hell. The second death, 2 Thessalonians 1, verses 8 and 9. It says, God will inflict vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.
That is what happens when we wonder from the truth.

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When we do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus, we suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and his might.
[17:05] It reminds us that there is a way that seems right to man, but in its end it leads to death or destruction.

All we like sheep have gone astray. We have wondered everyone to his own way. The consequent of that is that the Lord had laid on him the iniquity of us all. It is our wondering that merits our death. We follow the course of this world we read this morning in Ephesians 2 and are by nature children of wrath. When we die in that state, God pours out his wrath on us for an eternity.
That is a terrible thing. And when our friends wander, they couch it in language like living their truth or following their heart or breaking the chains of religion, and they make it seem like we are keeping them from being their most true and most happy selves, but we have to pursue them because we love them and see their certain end through the lens of Scripture and not the lens of their feelings. We see what Scripture says is the consequence from their wondering, and it should make us shudder to think about.
[18:24] So there will be those among you that wonder from the truth. The consequence for the wanderer is hell. Number four, it is the responsibility of all believers to bring back the wanderer to the truth.

It is the responsibility of all believers to bring back the wanderer to the truth. He is speaking to the congregation. My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death, will cover a multitude of sins.
He is not speaking to specifically the shepherds or the elders or the pastors or the teachers. He is speaking to the whole congregation. It is your responsibility.
Jude, verses 20 to 23, says, But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God and have mercy on those who doubt. And it says this, save others by snatching them out of the fire. Galatians 6.1 says it this way, Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.
[20:02] Just keep watch on yourself lest you too be tempted. It's important to note that the person who intervenes in the life of someone who wonders, according to these last two verses or sections of verses in Jude and Galatians, must be spiritual, must be gentle, must be wise, must be humble.

It's a great partner text for what we learned this morning that if we just take joy in confronting and rebuking and correcting, we should perhaps watch our motives and our spirit.
The fleshly, harsh, and arrogant have no business trying to rescue the wonderings, but yet they are often the wondering people because they are often the ones who are trying to do that. If you relish the idea of confronting someone, you probably shouldn't.
You must be spiritual. You must be gentle. You must be wise. You must be humble. Jude says you must be building yourself up in the faith and prayerful in the Holy Spirit, keeping yourself in the love of God.
This is all very similar to Jesus' own instructions to when you remove the speck from a brother's eye, you are to address your own eye first so that you can actually go and help your brother.
[21:28] That verse is often taken out of context, right? As if we're not meant to judge at all. We're just meant to judge in the right spirit, with the right motives, and with godly intentions for the benefit edification of that fellow believer because we don't want them to stumble into sin.

There's an old Fanny Crosby hymn. It's just funny, by the way, because Michael knows so many hymns and so many authors of those hymns that I don't know, and yet he gets to talk to Matt Boswell and has zero clue that he wrote His Mercy is More, which he built his entire dissertation around.
And I'm not embarrassed, but you do know so many hymns and authors. I just don't get to meet Fanny Crosby and embarrass myself in front of her.
Her hymn says, Rescue the perishing. Care for the dying. Snatch them in pity. That's right out of Jude.
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave. Weep over the erring one. Lift up the fallen. Tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save.

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[22:50] I recognize that when someone walks away, it's usually not clear cut. Oftentimes it can be messy. Oftentimes relationships are strained or broken in the process.

Rarely does it leave someone unwounded in the process of those walking away. It's in those times that can be really easy, just out of our own self-preservation, our own protection, to wound back. That's human nature. That's why the whole idea of forgiveness is absorbing without wounding back. Because if you continue, it's just an escalating process of wounding, wounding, wounding.
That's why the picture of Christ taking on all of our sin without inflicting it upon us is such a powerful picture and action of his love for us.
We tend to gather support for our side or we lob grenades back or we put up this wall of just indifference. We don't care if they walk away.
[23:53] Go do your thing. Go be unhappy somewhere else at another church. That's fine. We're going to continue doing what we do here. But yet, how often do we sit and weep over those who are straying?

If we didn't forsake some confidences, we as pastors could tell you of conversations we have had across the breakfast table or across our desk where we are begging and pleading for someone to repent and to come back and they walk away, never to return.
It's heartbreaking, right? How often do we weep over the erring one? But I want us to also make note that he is speaking, as I mentioned before, that this is not just a pastoral role.
This is your role as a believer in this church to look for those people, to be mindful of those people, to not say, well, I mean, that's our pastor's job.
We're just going to step back and let them kind of, surely they know about it. No, you're to go. You are to pursue. We want to equip you as you do that. We want to walk with you as you do that. If you need resources and how to have those conversations, we want to help you.
[25:06] If you need a second person in the conversation, we'll go along. Whatever it takes, but that is your role. Don't step back from ministry and say, well, they've got it as the pastors.

They've got a program for this. Surely they'll figure it out. I know I haven't seen that person in two months. I'm sure it's on the pastor's radar. I'm not going to reach out. I'm not going to text. I'm not going to send them a message, but James is telling us it is your duty and your responsibility to do just that.
So there will be those among you that wonder from the truth. The consequence for the wanderer is hell. It is the responsibility of every believer to pursue them.
Lastly, the reward for returning from wandering is salvation. The reward for returning from wandering is salvation.
So let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. There will be some that will interpret this verse to think that when you are doing the bringing back of a believer that it is doing something in your own soul, saving you from death and covering your sins, but that's not really what we think is happening in this verse.
[26:27] It is truly when you bring back a sinner, you are assisting, you are the agent, the grace of the Lord, what the Lord uses to bring this person back, to save this person's soul from death, and to cover a multitude of sins.

And the reward for returning is salvation. 1 Thessalonians 1, verse 9 and 10 says, For they themselves report, he goes on to say, how you turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.
He is delivering us from the wrath to come when we turn and repent of our sins. This is the gospel message. And yes, we are to preach the gospel message even to believers.
That is why that we've tried to make everything that we do in this church and in these walls gospel-centric and word-centric because we never want to assume the gospel.
I want to say the gospel regularly in choir rehearsal because I've had choir members who leave never to return. They have proven that they were not of us because they have departed from us.
Sunday school teachers, don't assume the gospel when you teach your Sunday school lesson.
[27:46] Don't assume because they are coming to Sunday school that they've got it. Don't assume that they are converted. And for all the believers in the room, why would we grow weary of celebrating the gospel anyways?

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When you're teaching children and they're three and they're four and you're like, they're not old enough to understand it anyways, preach the gospel to them. We want to saturate the hearts and minds of every person in this church with the gospel for every, for the sake of each soul that enters in here.
We don't ever want to be responsible for them having come, partnered with us and left with never really truly being confronted with the gospel, never truly being called to repent.
it says, them know that he will save his soul from death. I misspoke earlier and said the use of the word truth was used four or five times.
It's actually this word here, save, was used four of five times in James to refer specifically to salvation. So we know this is not just for a believer that is stumbling, non-believer and it refers to salvation when they are saved.
[28:59] It saved his soul from death. It will cover a multitude of sins. This just reiterates the hopeless condition of sinners. It's why we're saying our sins, they are many.

It will save you from a multitude of sins. Not only does it bring forgiveness for the path that this person has chosen, but it also prevents that person from continuing farther along that dead-end path.
One of the other songs that we cut from the song list tonight was All I Have is Christ, right? I think that is it, Jeff. I'm looking at you as I ran my hell-bound race indifferent to the cost, right?
That is the same idea that we are preventing them from running further down this hell-bound race.
Psalm 32, verse 1 says, Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.
1 Peter 2, verse 24 to 25, says, He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree. We might die to sin and live to righteousness.
[30:13] By his wounds you have been healed. Listen to this. It says, For you were straying, planeo, same word, planet, straying like sheep.

You've now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. When you come back from the truth or come back to the truth, the reward is being returned to the shepherd and the overseer of your soul.
One of my favorite Puritan authors, Thomas Brooks, wrote a great work, Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices.
This was written in the mid-17th century. He has this quote that has always stuck with me. I don't know who the person named in here is.
He names a gentleman. I think it's applicable for us as we close. When the physicians told Theodomus that unless he did abstain from drunkenness and uncleanness, he would lose his eyes.
[31:24] So in other words, if he doesn't forsake this ungodly way of living, he was literally on a path where his eyesight would be lost because it was so unhealthy for his body.

It says this, his heart was so bewitched to his sins that he answered, then farewell, sweet light. He had rather lose his eyes, Brooks says, than leave his sin.
So a man bewitched with sin had rather lose God, Christ, heaven, and his own soul than part with his sin. Oh, therefore, forever take heed of playing with or nibbling at Satan's golden baits.
So while this is true, a man bewitched with his sin, if Demas never repented in his, towards the latter half of his life, it's the same description. If he's so bewitched with his sin, if he is in love with this present world, he would rather lose God, Christ, heaven, and his own soul, but the other and the opposite is true.
If you are willing to part with your sin, you gain Christ, God, heaven, and your soul is saved. So we just want to give us a couple of points of application before I close.
[32:52] Number one, diligently guard your own heart from wondering. It's entirely possible that you're in this room and you're wandering and you know it.

You realize it. Nobody else around you does. Around you does. Or it may be that you're walking and living your Christian life and everything is going well, but we're called to diligently guard our own heart from wandering.
wandering. I'm not wanting you to come from this message and doubt your salvation, but I want you to diligently protect and guard your salvation as much as depends on you, knowing that it ultimately depends on the Lord, but it's your responsibility to guard your heart and before we start looking around at other believers wondering if they're straying, we need to make sure that we ourselves are not wandering.

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There may be areas of your life where you have made some sacrifices. You have compromised is the word I've been looking for this entire 30 minutes and it finally comes to me.
You may be making some compromises, which we probably all, if we are honest, do. And God calls us to repent of that.
[34:12] Make sure that you are not setting yourself up to make more and more compromise and wander further and further from the truth. Number two, be on the lookout for those whose faith is wavering.

Hopefully this is a very easy application for you to gather, but be on the lookout for those whose faith is wavering and understand that you may not see that.
They may not prove that until they ultimately walk away, but don't let it be so that they have walked away and it is months or years before you think about that person in any way.
Right? Be on the lookout. Be looking. There's a difference between a shepherd and sheep. Sheep graze about and don't have their head up looking for anything. Shepherds, guardians, protectors are watching for anything that could lead their sheep astray.
and that is the heart that you have to have as a fellow believer in the context of the local church.
Lastly, love them enough to pursue them and have hard conversations.
[35:24] Don't prioritize and value so much just keeping the peace at the expense of that person's soul.

right? We've got to have hard conversations at times and you need to love them enough to do that.
Often wonder whatever happened to Demas.
Was he pursued? Did Paul write to one of his friends and say, Mark, will you go find Demas in Thessalonica and make sure you have a conversation with him?
I don't know. I hope so. We may see Demas in heaven. We're not made privy to that. Part of the reason I think is to serve as a warning for us all. I hope Demas is in heaven but that would only come if somebody followed after him, pursued him and he repented because he proved himself to be an unbeliever.
But it's a stark warning for us all. So we end where we began. I don't know if you caught the lyrics of the first song. Maybe they'll resonate with you a little differently now.
[36:35] Brethren, see poor sinners around you. They're slumbering on the brink of woe. Death is coming.

Hell is moving. Can you bear to let them go? See our fathers and our mothers and our children sinking down.
Brethren, pray in holy manna will be showered all around. Sisters, will you join and help us? Moses' sister aided him. Will you help the trembling mourners who are struggling hard with sin?
Tell them all about the Savior. Tell them that he will be found. Sisters, pray in holy manna will be showered all around. That's brothers, that's sisters.
Let us all love our God supremely. Let us love each other too. Let us love and pray for sinners until our God makes all things new. That is our calling until he calls us home.
[37:37] Then he'll call us home to heaven and at his table we'll sit down. Christ himself will serve us, gird himself and serve us with sweet manna all around.

May that be true of us as believers here at First Baptist Mustang. Don't let them stray. Don't let them wonder. Lord, we give this evening to you.
We thank you for the challenge of your words to us through your servant James. We thank you for his boldness to call the believers there to pursue with a Christ-like fervency and heart with mercy and grace to pursue those that wonder from the truth.
We can't do that, Lord, if we ourselves are wondering so help us to guard our souls diligently but give us eyes to see those that are wandering. Give us ears to hear the words that are being spoken that would clue us in to they are walking away and most of all give us boldness to pursue them in love so that perhaps they would return to the shepherd and overseer of their souls.
We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. God bless you.

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[39:00] God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. fathers you. God bless you. God bless you. Thank you.

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