

A Conclusion to James

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – a conclusion to the book of James and its view of living by faith in Christ
2. aim – to cause us to truly consider the impact of faith upon our lives, and to live accordingly
3. passage – James 1:22; 2:14

b. outline

1. The Idea of James
2. The Substance of James
3. The Breath of James

c. opening

1. the **success** of concluding this letter
 - a. 44 sermons (inclusive of this one); 39 hours of preaching at the end of today (avg. 53:13)
 - b. 15 “distinct” titles (including Intro and Conclusion); 13 different **pericopes** in multi-part sermons
2. the **metaphor** in concluding this letter
 - a. **question**: how do you summarize 11 months of preaching, such that the importance of the letter is securely fixed in the minds of the audience (**i.e. not forgotten**)
 - b. **suggestion**: recap the main point of every sermon, so that the letter is virtually repeated (~4 hrs.)
 - c. **better**: build a conclusion around a **metaphorical approach** to the letter as a whole; **e.g.** I want to use a method similar to what God did (metaphorically) **in forming Adam (see below)**
 1. **step #1**: God started with an “idea” (decree) of a creature in his own image (the thesis)
 2. **step #2**: God entered into his creation, and formed the creature from the dust (the substance)
 3. **step #3**: God breathed into the creature to bring him into existence (the life)

I. The Idea of James

Content

a. the audience of the letter (like the decree of God)

1. written by James, the half-brother of Jesus and the leader of the Jerusalem church, around 45AD
2. written to a *dispersion* of Jewish Christians suffering under both religious and political persecution

b. the thesis of the letter (like the idea of Adam)

1. James’ statement in **1:22** is the **thesis** of the entire work
 - a. James is concerned that Christians might “*deceive themselves*” into thinking incorrectly about what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ, **and then live in that deception**
 1. **i.e.** the **tendency** within us: to “disconnect” what we *believe* from what we *do*; the “natural” condition of the flesh whereby we tend to think one way but act another (**a self-deception**)
 - b. **IOW**: **what is genuine saving faith** (vs. a faith that is “professed” but not lived)?
2. James’ question in **2:14** is the **follow-up** to his thesis
 - a. **IOW**: James is answering the question: **what is saving faith?** – what does *true faith look like* in the *life* of the individual – is it only a “*profession*,” or does it have a *living component*?
 - b. **saving faith is always consistent between what we believe and what we do**

II. The Substance of James

Content

a. the outline of the letter (like the main structure of Adam)

1. **section #1 (1:1-2:26)**: the **nature** of genuine faith (what is saving faith?)
2. **section #2 (3:1-5:12)**: the connection of genuine faith **to life** (how is saving faith lived out?)
3. **epilogue (5:13-20)**: the **practical** realities of genuine faith (how do we cope with faithlessness?)

b. the substance of the letter (like the subsystems of Adam)

1. **the testing of saving faith (1:1-4)** – true faith will inevitably face trials, but believers must count them as all joy, for they strengthen our faith (**an opening connection to the reality of the audience**)
 - a. (**read 1:2**) joy is the long-term recognition of **true value** in any given situation that gives us a strong sense of assurance, even when our emotional state runs contrary to that assurance

- b. so, *true* followers of Christ *know* that trials are essential to building up *more faith in them* – the more we are forced to trust God’s word, *the more we will* – this is our *joy!*
2. **the need for wisdom and humility (1:5-11)** – the trials of faith need wisdom and humility, both of which are gifts of God during such times (**testing → wisdom/humility**)
 - a. wisdom is the proper application of knowledge – taking what we *know* and *using it well*
 - b. faith and doubt will always coexist, and there will always be the question of *why?*
 - c. (**read 1:5**) so, what we need in the face of our *testings* is wisdom – we need to seek understanding from God as to *why* we are suffering, *and he will give such wisdom as a gift*
 - d. and, what we need in the face of our *seeking* is humility – we must come before the Lord and accept the wisdom that he gives us, *even if it doesn’t fit our preconceived ideas*
 3. **every good and perfect gift (1:12-18)** – steadfastness of faith, even within our own sin, is a good and perfect gift of God (**testing → wisdom/humility → steadfastness**)
 - a. (**read 1:12**) the one who can *truly* call himself a Christian is the one who is willing to take on a life of *testing* and then *holds on* to Christ, *proving* he belongs to Jesus
 - b. although God himself does not tempt us to or cause us to sin, he has ordained that our personal struggle with sin should act as *tests of faith*, designed to force us to trust him all the more
 - c. so, all that we experience in our testings of faith in the world are what God is doing (as a gift) *to separate us from everyone else, to draw us out as a unique people, a people he loves*
 - d. **stop: our trust in God in this world will be tested (it is essential), and we will need wisdom and humility to face it – but, these trials of faith are gifts of God, setting us apart unto him**
 4. **be doers of the word (1:19-27)** – the essence of true faith is to be active doers of what God’s word commands of us in all of life (**a statement of the thesis**)
 - a. (**read 1:22**) to be a *doer* of the word is to be *listening* to the word of God, not *holding* to your “opinions” of what is true (traditions), and certainly not *resisting* what the Lord desires to teach you
 - b. the Christian life is the pursuit of *holiness*, the conformity of our entire existence to our nature as “*a new creation in Christ*” – a freedom from the slavery of “checklists” (ontological)
 - c. so, the Christian must avoid one of *the most fundamental self-deceptions* that tempts him: to forget who we truly *are* by God’s reckoning and go out to live *in another way* (self-deceived)
 5. **the sin of partiality (2:1-13)** – an example of *inconsistent* religion: to show partiality towards others on the basis of class (**a contra-thesis example**)
 - a. (**read 2:1**) partiality on the basis of *anything* is inconsistent because 1) it creates another standard of salvation, 2) it dishonors the poor man, and 3) it perverts the primary message of the church
 - b. it is *inconsistent* for the true follower of Jesus to “claim” to love God and love others (the royal law) while showing deference to one class of people over another (**IOW: partiality = contra-thesis**)
 6. **faith without works is dead (2:14-26)** – saving faith demonstrates itself through the works (the life) of the believer (**a restatement of the thesis**)
 - a. (**read 2:14**) faith cannot be just a *profession*, but something far greater: can a *professorial* “faith” really save a person; can it truly be considered *faith* if it’s only *words*?
 - b. faith is a **radical** trust in Christ = a trust in Christ as *Lord* characterized by a set of *existential actions* (at the core) flowing out as *utter submission to him in every area of our lives*
 - c. thus, like Abraham, the true Christian goes “all-in” trusting in God, offering his *entire life* to be transformed by his beliefs – he is justified (in every way) because his life demonstrates faith
 - d. **stop (end of section #1): the true Christian understands faith ontologically – he hears the word of God and it transforms his life: he puts his whole life under the testing of faith**
 7. **taming the tongue (3:1-12)** – transformed speech is the first aspect of the life transformed by faith; the first great “*work of faith*” (**faith = transformed speech**)
 - a. one of the central *uniqueness* of the *Imago Dei* is our ability to *speak* (**see metaphor above**)
 - b. (**read 3:2**) what we say (and how we say it!) is reflective of *who we really are* – our speech is an *indicator* of our nature – it is in our speech that our regeneration is most notable
 - c. the first great “*work of faith*” is the content of our speech – faith is not just “professing” to believe, but speech that demonstrates the new nature within us
 8. **walking in wisdom (3:13-18)** – wisdom and understanding is a second aspect of the life transformed by faith (**transformed speech + a transformed worldview**)
 - a. (**read 3:13**) *everyone* who claims faith must be guided by a transformation of *the mind* that permeates conduct, *especially in our interpersonal relationships with other image-bearers*
 - b. the second great “*work of faith*” is the ability to see the world through a *Christian worldview* – faith is not just “professing” to believe, but having a *biblical* outlook on the world and its ways
 9. **a warning against worldliness (4:1-12)** – avoiding worldly passions is a third aspect of the life transformed by faith (**transformed speech + a transformed worldview + transformed passions**)

- a. **(read 4:1)** everyone who claims faith in Christ must be guided by a sense of *humility* and *self-sacrifice*, a transformation of our base desires which permeates our conduct, *especially in our interpersonal relationships with others who might see the world differently*
- b. the third great “work of faith” is to learn the nature of self-sacrifice, in utter *imitation* of Christ himself
- c. **stop: genuine saving faith is built upon this foundation of self-sacrifice – so, James will now demonstrate three (3) areas of life within which such self-sacrifice must be evident ...**
10. **who knows what tomorrow brings (4:13-17)** – life is short and to live for the will of God in all things is what it means to do the true works of faith (**self-sacrifice = an eternal view of life**)
 - a. **(read 4:14)** the unregenerate man has nothing but this tenuous life, but the regenerate man has an eternal life, thus the approach to life in the two men *will (must!) be completely different*
 - b. the Christian is to recognize that this life (for the elect) is to do the will of God in all things; to sacrifice one’s personal goals and desires for the overarching will of God – he is to look away from himself and see what God wills for his life to produce, *what will last into eternity*
11. **a warning to the rich (5:1-6)** – materialism is deadly, so the believer is to seek of life of austerity and righteousness rather than greed and self-indulgence (**self-sacrifice = an eternal view of life + material self-denial**)
 - a. **(read 5:1)** *all* believers need to be prepared to accept the “suffering” that will attend making the choice to follow Christ – the *denial of self*, essential to being a Christian, may result in much *economic misery* in this life, and we must be prepared to accept it
 - b. either *purposely* and *concretely* choose to follow Christ in a life of self-sacrifice, or the choice of indulging in a life of greed and luxury will be irresistible
12. **be patient in suffering (5:7-12)** – faith in God demands a strong sense of patience in the believer in every kind of suffering (**self-sacrifice = an eternal view of life + material self-denial + patience in suffering**)
 - a. **(read 5:7-8a)** genuine faith is willing to *wait* for the Lord to grant comfort *and* willing to accept the sufferings of the present knowing that (eventually) all will be made right – those who have a promised existence *beyond this life* are able to be patient *in this life*
 - b. faith is visible within us by how we treat eternity in relation to this life – faith is a trust in the promises of God *that we are willing to wait to receive*
 - c. **stop (end of section #2): the works of genuine faith are: transformed speech, a transformed worldview, and a set of transformed passions, including an eternal view of life, material self-denial, and patience in suffering**
13. **the prayer of faith (5:13-20)** – believers are to seek God in the prayer of faith to strengthen our trust in him during times of doubt and confusion
 - a. **(read 5:16)** what the struggling believer always needs is a word of revelation, of illumination, of exhortation within his or her circumstances that leads to greater faith (patience) *through them*
 - b. although God has *purposed* what his goals will be, he has *also* purposed that the intimate communication he has with his own children *will be a means of accomplishing those goals*
 - c. **stop (end of epilogue): the believer will struggle with doubt, and those doubts will affect his works of faith, but God has promised to accomplish his purposes in the elect**

III. The Breath of James

Content

- a. **the life of the letter (like the living nature of Adam)**
 1. **question:** what has been the *driving emotion* of most of our lives over the last 11 months?
 2. **answer: fear!** – e.g. pandemic (i.e. fear of anyone dying from a novel coronavirus); political (i.e. fear of one or the other); racial (i.e. fear of unrest or ostracization); weather (i.e. fear of another storm)
 3. **principle: fear is the opposite of faith – to fear the world is to distrust the promises of God to see us through the trials we are ordained to experience (Matthew 10:26-33)**
“So have no fear of [those who would persecute you for following me], for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”
 - a. faith isn’t just a *profession* of words – that “blows away” easily when fear descends
 - b. faith is a *resolve* to trust in Christ at your very core – who you are that does not fear the world
 - c. faith must be *manifestly visible* in every aspect of your life – it is to walk *without fear* that God’s word can be trusted, to take the long view of life, and to be transformed in every aspect of living
 4. **we are to be a people of true faith, that count it all joy as we face the future (read 1:2-4)**