

Conclusion to the Book of James Sermon 23 in the James Series

James 1:1

Today we conclude our series in the Book of James.

We have seen the book is written, primarily as an exhortation to Christians.

And James does not pull any punches – as he exhorts us to a life of obedience and serious in our self-examination.

I. Principles that Guided our Study

1. We believe the Book of James IS inspired and is part of the Word of God.
2. We do not believe that James could be presenting “another gospel” since it is inspired.
3. James is practical and pastoral more than theological and technical.

Paul is the great theologian of the church.

James is a great pastor in the church – and his exhortations are not at odds with Paul – but they are the other side of the coin.

Faith will always produce fruit – 30 – 60 – 100 fold – Jesus and Paul say the same.

So faith w/o works is dead – it is not real faith at all – which is living. Works without faith is legalism and heresy, and trying to win favor with God by works/righteousness IS NOT what James teaches at all.

We are to be Christ-like.
Our hope is in what Christ has done for us.

4. Christians need the gospel – where is the gospel in James?
It is there – but not in an overt and open way.

We need to remember James IS NOT the only Book in the Bible
And James SHOULD NOT be read in a vacuum.

We do James no justice as we import the comfort of the gospel into these passages which tell us what we should do – even though we know we are fully incapable of doing them.

Instead of lying under a load of condemnation

We should flee to Christ, remember the imputation of his righteousness and rest in the truth of HIS FULFILLING all righteousness on our behalf.

5. James is not a legalistic book

He is Jewish.

- We find ideas from a Palestinian Jewish perspective
- but he also presents ideas from a Hellenistic Jewish perspective.

James was well aware of the Palestinian and Hellenistic Jewish tensions and controversies. As you recall – in his own church – there had been the controversy over the widows that led to the formation of the office of deacon.

James is writing primarily to Jewish Christians who were now scattered across the Mediterranean area – some were Hellenists who had gone back to familiar surroundings and others were those who had lived in Israel – and now had to adjust to life in lands where Greek culture was the primary influence.

The point is -- it's not a legal book. Nowhere does he try to bind Jewish ceremonial laws upon us – in fact – the book is devoid of Jewish ceremonial laws.

II. Walking Where We Have Been

1:2-4

He wastes no time getting to some of the most practical exhortation possible.
His readers are going through trials – count it all joy!
How many times have WE encouraged ourselves with this Scripture?

There is a purpose – even in trials – things are not RANDOM!

Right away, we can see Pastor James teaching something so very practical that Christians have quoted it and held it dear for centuries.

Difficulties are not experienced the same way for the Christian or the Lost person.

WILDFIRES devastate a neighborhood.

The wicked man's house burns.
The Christians house burns.

It could be – God will use that providence to awaken the lost man turn the wicked from his sins.

However – it might only further harden him – either in bitterness against THE GOD WHO WOULD LET THIS HAPPEN – or harden him in his own SELF-RELIANCE – “I can overcome this. Whatever doesn't kill me makes me stronger! I'll pick myself up by my own bootstraps”. And he becomes more proud and arrogant.

The Christian suffers the same difficulty – but with the full knowledge that God did not send this for his DESTRUCTION – but even this comes from the hand of a loving Heavenly Father.

The Christian does not necessarily need to know WHY it happened – maybe in time that will be revealed – or at least partially revealed – but the Christian needs to TRUST GOD – and believe there is a purpose behind it all.

Count it all Joy my Brothers

James calls us to joy in the midst of trial.

Why?

Because – for the Christian – there is a PURPOSE in trials.

This is not living IN DENIAL.

This is living BY FAITH and trusting God

This is believing that the God who loves me so much

– that He chose me

– and gave Christ to die for me

– and has sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in me

– has a plan and a purpose for my good – just like Paul says in

Romans 8:28 -- *And we know that all things work together for good*

to those who love God, to those who are called according to His

purpose. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be

conformed to the image of His Son,

There's the grand purpose.

-- James calls it steadfastness and being made mature or perfect.

-- Paul calls it being conformed to the image of His Son.

Both agree that it won't happen fully until the final day.

But both also agree that the process has already begun – for the

Christian – here on earth – right now!

One of the methods God uses is TRIALS.

The trials James refers to here are the various and normal trials that come upon us all.

Sickness – financial reversals -- loneliness – poverty -- persecution.

Difficulties of any kind -- VARIOUS trials.

He is talking about the things that could shake our faith

– but they don't -- instead – by God's grace -- we preserve through

these trials – and become stronger in our faith.

1:5-8

Again, we are encouraged that we are not left on our own.

Wisdom is available.

We need to ASK – trust God – who is the source of all wisdom – not trust our own wisdom – but ask IN FAITH.

1:12 – The blessing of ENDURANCE and the importance of enduring.

There is a prize at the end.

ETERNAL LIFE!

To summarize the first 12 verses:

We see the nature of God contrasted with the nature of the natural man.

- Man is changeable and fickle.
- Man is tossed to and fro.
- Man is often double-minded and unstable.

God is just the opposite

- God is simple – he does not change.
- He works all things according to His purpose (which often remains a mystery to us – so we accept it by faith).
- God is not unstable or double-minded.

We are exhorted to believe God and trust in Him fully.

We are to ASK HIM for wisdom, and believe that **He has given it** IN HIS WORD **and will give it** through a variety of His providential dealings.

1:13 – One of the more important theological truths in all of Scripture.

And then a rebuke to those who would make excuses for their sin.

1:14-15

Here is the true source of sin – our own desires.

Here is the horrible progression of sin.

Desire – conception – birth -- death

More great theological truths come from the pen of James.

1:17

God is the author of GOOD GIFTS to His children.

Don't fear asking for bread and getting a stone.

Don't worry that if you ask for a fish that you will be given a serpent.

And another truth about the God – He is unchanging and unchangeable!

Our God is IMMUTABLE.

He DOES NOT CHANGE.

He is INCAPABLE of CHANGE – because change is for the better or for the worse – and how can God get BETTER and still be God.

Every living creature CHANGES.

We grow – we mature – we begin to deteriorate and die.

And if that is not enough

James makes a statement that could easily have come from the pen of Paul himself

Did James believe in the doctrines of grace? OF COURSE!

v. 18 – I think it is fair to say that this is THE KEY VERSE in James.

He is the great CREATOR.

We (as Christians) are His NEW CREATION.

-- Salvation is THE WORK OF GOD.

It comes to us by HIS WILL (v. 18)
It comes to us by HIS WORD (v. 18)
It comes to us to CHANGE US (v. 18)

-- It is implanted in us BY GOD and received BY FAITH (v. 21)

-- Salvation comes to us in THREE TENSES.
We WERE saved by the Word.
We ARE BEING saved by the Word.
We WILL BE SAVED by the Word.

Verse 21 makes perfect sense when we connect it to verse 18.

But in the midst of these great theological truths – James takes us right back to practical exhortation again.

1:19-20

And when one references the book of James – it is very possible the first verse they think of is:

1:22

2:1 – Partiality – one of the key themes in James.

James has harsh words against those who would show favoritism to the rich and despise the poor.

In this way – James is much like the OT wisdom literature, which often warns of the sin of showing favoritism.

2:14 -- and with that statement – we find some of the most controversial verses in Scripture.

The theme of the reformation was FAITH ALONE.

The theme of the Roman Catholic Counter-reformation became **2:24**

But they were misinterpreting James.

I hope we have shown that as we dealt with these passages.

The sermons are available.

Luther himself says:

...We say that justification is effective without works, not that faith is without works. For that faith which lacks fruit is not an efficacious but a feigned faith. ... It is one thing that faith justifies without works; it is another thing that faith exists without works. [LW 34: 175-176].

OMIT – UNLESS HELPFUL

A. Luther and the Book of James

Alpha Omega Ministries – James Swan

One the most popular quotations from Luther is the infamous "epistle of straw" remark, directed at the canonicity of the book of James. It really is amazing how frequently this citation appears.

Six points – I'll mention two of them

This quote only appears in Luther's original 1522 Preface to the New Testament. After 1522, all the editions of Luther's Bible dropped the "epistle of straw" comment, along with the entire paragraph that placed value judgments on particular biblical books (Hebrews). It was Luther himself who edited these comments out. For anyone to continue to cite Luther's "epistle of straw" comment against him is to do him an injustice. He saw fit to retract the comment. Subsequent citations of this quote should bear this in mind.

*It is true Luther had a contextual problem with the content on James. He saw a contradiction between Paul and James on faith and works. Some conclude Luther missed the harmonization between these two Biblical writers, but this isn't true either. Luther's great biographer **Roland Bainton** pointed out, " 'Faith,' he wrote, 'is a living, restless thing. It cannot be inoperative. **We are not saved by works; but if there be no works, there must be something amiss with faith**' " [Here I Stand, 259].*

3:1-2

A very proper warning to those who would become teachers/pastors in Christ's church.

We all stumble in many things.

There is a well-known pastor in RB circles who had to write a public letter a couple of weeks ago.

He inadvertently became part of a controversy.

He was quoted – from a lecture he gave in 2008 – in which he made what could be considered an unfortunate statement.

He had NO IDEA of the controversy involved when he made the statement.

He had NO IDEA he had been quoted about what he said.

When he found out – he had no choice but to set the record straight.

We all stumble.

He was very humble with his answer – admitting that he could no longer agree with what he said in 2008 – now that he had more light and better understanding of the issues involved.

That takes a lot of humility.

But HUMILITY is a prerequisite for a PASTOR or TEACHER!

We all stumble – but when a teacher stumbles – he can take students with him.

James uses the warning to pastors to launch into important teaching on the importance THAT WE ALL HAVE of guarding our tongues.

This is another part of the book of James that sounds so much like Hebrew Wisdom Literature – as does the rest of chapter 3.

The source of our sin is disclosed.

4:1-3

And again – we are called to humility **4:6**

More practical exhortations are given – taken from various OT texts, along with Christ’s sermon on the Mount.

Finally, James warns against PRESUMPTION
4:13-17

Chapter 5 was preached recently – and I don’t think we need to review that material – and of course – all of the previous 22 messages are on the internet, covering every verse of the Book of James.

James writes primarily to Christians.
James writes primarily about living the Christian life.

But – unless you know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior YOU CANNOT live the Christian life.

Morality is no substitute for Salvation.

Being good enough is not possible – if there is any message that should come through loud and clear in James – it is that.

We are sinners.
BUT – there is a savior of sinners – the Lord Jesus Christ.

We call out to Him – in faith believing.
We turn to Him – in repentance for our sin.
We trust in Him – because He alone can save us from the destruction we deserve.

ALL OUR HOPES ARE IN CHRIST.
And friend, if your hopes are in anything else – your hope is vain – and your dreams – whatever they may be will be dashed.

Won’t you come to Christ.
Won’t you believe on Him.

John 3:36

John 3:36 “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

PRAY

Hymn 441

Benediction: 1:17-18