

James 1:1-18 Lesson

Read James 1:1-18 together.

Sermon: How True Faith Responds to Trials

1.) True Faith Stands Firm in Trials Because God is Sovereign (vs. 2-8)

- a.) Joy through how we "reckon" or "regard" our trials
- b.) Tests with a purpose - mature faith
- c.) The role of wisdom in trials

2.) True Faith Stands Firm in Trials Because God is Faithful (vs. 9-12)

- a.) How faith turns our world-view and values upside down
- b.) The promise of eternal life is the light at the end of the tunnel

3.) True Faith Stands Firm in Trials Because God is Good (vs. 13-18)

- a.) The difference between "testing" and "tempting"
- b.) Our assurance of God's goodness

*** Questions***

1. How does the world define "faith"? How do Christians misunderstand faith?
2. How does doctrine determine behavior?
3. How would a lack of belief in God's sovereignty affect one's view of suffering?
4. What does "Christ-like suffering" look like?
5. How does God give us wisdom?
6. How do our Lord's promises affect our worldview (and therefore our behavior)?
7. How do we develop a more eternal perspective on our lives?
8. How can good be both sovereign and good when our circumstances are bad?
9. Share a trial that you've been through where you learned more deeply that God is sovereign, faithful, and good.

FACILITATOR'S RESOURCES

Adapted from Knowing the Bible: James by Greg Gilbert

Gospel Connections:

James, a Servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

One major objection to the book of James, that many critics have, is that it never gives a systematic outline of the Gospel. They would be missing the point of what James is doing. James is writing to an audience that already understands the Gospel. They understand that their faith is put in Jesus Christ who saves and justifies them. James knew this and he knew who Jesus, his brother, truly was, that is why he uses Jesus CHRIST. "Christ" was not their family last name, it is a theological title that means "God's Anointed One" or the promised Messiah, the king who would save His people from their sins. James' "systematic" presentation of the Gospel is summed up in these 3 words, Lord Jesus Christ.

The Character of Faith

We live in culture that is always looking for the next best thing that is summed up in 2 acronyms (I didn't come up with either): YOLO (You Only Live Once) and FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out). A theme that runs throughout all of James, but is most clearly seen in this passage is that authentic faith is not divided, double-minded, or unstable. It is not always looking of the next best thing, but it is grounded in, and gives itself wholly to, Jesus and Jesus alone for salvation.

What Steadfastness is Grounded In

James, who wrote before Paul, presents a theme that Paul picks up on in his letters which is unity with Christ is what we boast in. It is not in our physical means, neither the rich nor the poor have anything to boast in outside of Christ. When the world (and even Christians) sees the rich as more honorable or respected, they (the rich) should actually boast in their humiliation for before God they see their need for Jesus and their only hope in the cross. With Paul in Galatians 6:14 they should say, "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has ben crucified to me, and I to the world."

Bible Connections:

The Twelve Tribes of the Dispersion

Hundreds of years before Christ the twelve tribes of Israel where in exile. They were a people who had no home, scattered among the nations of the world. The northern kingdom (Israel) was taken into captivity by the Assyrians (722 BC) and the southern kingdom (Judah) by the Babylonians (538 BC). The Old Testament Prophets where sent to give hope that one day God would reunited, return, and restore the tribes to their land (Jer. 31:7-14, Ez. 37:15-28). During this time of exile God's people are called "strangers" and "aliens", these names are picked up in the New Testament by James, Paul, and Peter as they write to the Church who are dispersed, persecuted, and waiting for Jesus to return in order to reunite and restore His people.

The Benefits of Trials

There is a rise of prosperity Gospel that seeks to diminish the role and benefit of trials in a Christian's life, but the New Testament is very clear that if you are going to follow Jesus you will face trials of all kinds. We can not expect anything less than what our Savior went through which were wilderness trials (Matt. 4:1-11), temptations of every kind (Heb. 4:15), and even death (Phil. 2:8). So likewise we are called to endure and persevere. Yet the Bible teaches us

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that what man means for evil God will turn to good (Gen. 50:20), and He use all things, especially trials to mould us and refine us to look more like Christ (Rom. 8:28-29, 1 Peter 1:7)

God Given Wisdom

Tim Keller says that wisdom is reality, seeing things as they really are. Proverbs tells us that true wisdom only comes from God himself. (Prov. 2:6). Proverb goes on to tell us that wisdom is eternal (Prov. 8:22-23) and it was out of wisdom that the world was ordered (Prov. 8:27-31). Therefore wisdom is more than just snappy sayings, cliches, or clever solutions to problems, it is seeing the world as God sees the world, and then to act accordingly. So how has God most fully and completely revealed His mind and character to us? Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God.

Theological Connections:

Jesus As Christ

James, possibly the earliest letter written to the church and Mark, possibly the earliest Gospel written, start with the same truth claim; that Jesus is the Christ. This theological title is packed full of implications concerning who these two men, one his brother, the other an observer, thought Jesus was. James understood Jesus, his brother to be the long awaited Messiah, and all that entailed. That Jesus is the King who had come to inaugurate God's Kingdom, but he is also the King who would suffer in the place of his people in order to qualify them to share in that kingdom.

Exile is a Part of Christianity

Since the entrance of sin into the world God's people have been exiled. They have wandered, they are been strangers, and they have been alienated. Exile is a part of the Christian journey. In that exile, or dispersion, God gives community with other believers, He gives encouragement through His Word, and He gives us means of grace through the church. Yet if we are going to follow Christ, believe in His word, and live as He commands they will also be strangers and aliens in this world, and we should expect trials and struggles until He returns or calls us home.

The Goodness of God

From the very beginning we see that God only makes good things. The Bible is a consistent witness to God's unspeakable generosity and mercy. The Covenant to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and to Us is a testimony to His goodness and kindness to save. James says that God "gives generously" to those who ask Him, and He has proven time and time again that He is good, and not stingy.

This Life is Fleeting

Our physical lives do not last forever. Just as the grass withers and flower fades, so our lives are fleeting, gone in a blink of the eye. James underlines this reality, that the object of our faith matters, and we should not put it in things that are unstable and wavering, but in the unchangeable and immortal God.

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Additional Questions:

1:1-4

1. James addresses this letter to the “12 tribes in the Dispersion” but he is not writing only to Jewish believers (otherwise we wouldn’t be reading it!). He is alluding to the fact that just as the children of Israel were dispersed throughout the world in their exile, so also Christians are in an “exile” now, strangers in a strange land who are waiting for God to gather us all home and to Himself (1 Peter 1:1,2:11).

So what is the connection between verse 1 and 2?

How does a reminder to Christians of their “resident alien” status in this world set up James’ exhortation to them to “count it all joy” when they meet trials?

2. Verses 2-4 is a “chain argument” in which one thing leads to another. Trace the chain that James describes. What is the end result of our trials?

3. “Life on earth would not be worth much if every source of irritation were removed. Yet most of us rebel against the things that irritate us, and count as heavy loss what ought to be rich gain. We are told that the oyster is wiser; that when an irritating object, like a bit of sand, gets under the “mantle” of his shell, he simply covers it with the most precious part of his being and makes of it a pearl. The irritation that it was causing is stopped by encrusting it with pearly formation. A true pearl is therefore simply a victory over irritation. Every irritation that gets into our lives today is an opportunity for pearl culture. The more irritations the devil flings at us, the more pearls we may have. We need only to welcome them and cover them completely with love, the most precious part of us, and the irritation will be smothered out as the pearl comes into being. What a store of pearls we may have, if we will!” - R. Kent Hughes quoting Dick Seume in *James: Faith and Works*

The word “steadfastness” in verse 3 literally means “to remain under” like a person holding up a heavy weight for a long period of time. Think about the illustration you just read of an oyster, and think about someone who lifts weights for exercise.

What is the “full effect” of a person’s “steadfastness”?

What are some of the effects of our remaining steadfast under the weight of trials? (Share examples)

1:5-8

1. Going through trials and asking for Godly wisdom are not disconnected.

Read Proverbs 2:1-15

What is wisdom?

Where does it come from?

What are the benefits of having wisdom?

2. If wisdom is seeing the world as God sees this world and then living according to that knowledge then how does God see our trials in this life?

How is that different from the way we are tempted to see them?

If we could understand our trials as God understands them, how would we act differently?

3. In verse 6 James uses the word “doubts” which literally means “disputes”. James is saying that a Christian must not be “disputing” or “divided” within themselves. In other words, James is saying that someone who fundamentally is always doubting or divided toward God will never find stability or peace. This doesn’t mean that Christians don’t have doubts, but he is saying that those doubts are crossroads that either lead us away from God or close to God, and for a

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follower of Christ we must strive to take the side of God and put our faith in His Word. What are some strategies that Christians can use to fight doubt? How can you resist becoming “a double minded person, unstable in all your ways”?

1:9-11

1. Do you think James is setting up a simplistic equation that “rich equals evil and poor equals righteous” in these verses? Consider 4:13-17. What does the Bible as a whole teach us about wealth and poverty?
2. James is more concerning with his readers not to put reliance on their station in life, no matter what it is.
How does material wealth tend to lead to self-reliance?
Does material poverty always lead to reliance on God? If not, what kinds of things can it lead a person wrongly to rely on?
3. What kinds of things besides wealth do we (you and I) tend to rely on and boast in for a sense of well-being and security, rather than God?
4. Think about the Gospel and what it teaches, then think about your answers to the above question and consider why it is foolish to put your reliance in them. Why is Jesus better?