

Day 40, James 1

by David Servant

James encourages the scattered and suffering church to rejoice in their trials, persevere in their faith, and demonstrate their obedience through works of love.

Scripture: Acts 11:19, Galatians 5:6, James 1:2-5

Topics: "Faith And Works", "Persevering Through Trials"

Description

David Servant preaches on the Book of James, written to encourage and admonish the early Christian diaspora, emphasizing the testing of their faith amidst various trials and persecutions. James draws heavily from the Old Testament and Jesus' teachings, highlighting the importance of genuine faith and obedience to God's commandments. He addresses the financial hardships and temptations faced by the scattered believers, urging them to persevere and not be enticed to abandon their faith. James emphasizes that salvation can be forfeited through unbelief and stresses the significance of being 'doers of the word' through works of love and obedience to the law of liberty.

Transcript

We break from our journey through the book of Acts knowing that James authored his only epistle sometime shortly after the Jerusalem believers were scattered following Stephen's martyrdom (see Acts 11:19). The church was about ten years old when James wrote to encourage and admonish the Christian diaspora, the "twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad" (1:1), mostly Jewish believers. James wrote to a suffering and questioning church.

It is interesting to think that until this point in church history, there was no reading of any New Testament scripture at any gathering of Christians. There were no sermons in which the apostle Paul was quoted. It is very likely that none of the four Gospels had been penned either. The early Christians had only the Old Testament revelation and the oral teachings of Jesus passed down via the apostles. As we read James' letter, we'll see that it draws heavily from the Old Testament and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

In American sermons, James' "various trials" (1:2) are often described as those days when the washing machine breaks down, the dog gets sick, and it rains at the golf course. But those little inconveniences suffered by the world's wealthy are not what James had in mind. Having been forced to leave behind their homes and livelihoods, the scattered believers of James' time were experiencing a genuine "testing of their faith" in Jesus. Their "various trials," however, were not something outside of God's control or plan. Thus there was reason to rejoice. Their perseverance validated the sincerity of their faith in Christ, which

insured an eventual "crown of life" (1:22)---perhaps not a literal crown, but an expression signifying the glorious time when eternal life will be realized.

We should also "count it all joy" when we suffer persecution for our faith in Jesus! Then our faith is being proved genuine. That means eternal life awaits us!

The scattered Jerusalem believers also naturally experienced financial hardship as a result of being driven far from their homes. If any employment was available, it would have been the least desirable, such as labor in the fields of wealthy landowners. The scattered believers would have been tempted to be envious of those who had much more, and they would have been tempted to abandon their faith in Christ in order to return to their former prosperity. James admonishes them in this regard. The current inequity would one day be reversed, and so the humble brother "should glory in his high position" while the rich man should "glory in his humiliation" (1:9-10). James will return to this theme in tomorrow's reading.

James also reminds the scattered and suffering flock that, although God may certainly be testing them in the midst of their trials, He is not tempting them. God entices no one to do evil. It is interesting that James doesn't mention the devil, but blames temptation on the individual who allows himself to be "carried away and enticed by his own desires" (unfortunately translated "lust" in 1:14 and 15). Yielding to temptation results in sin, which James said results in death (1:15). Don't forget the historical context of James' words. He was talking about the temptation to abandon one's faith in Jesus and return to one's formerly non-persecuted life. This is a warning against apostasy that James will later repeat (see 5:19-20) and one of numerous biblical proofs that salvation can be forfeited through unbelief.

What is the most important thing? Obedience to God's commandments, or being "doers of the word" (1:22). Those who think themselves virtuous because they simply hear or know God's Word are deluded, which describes not a few pew-warming Christians. James will later elaborate more fully on the folly of faith that is void of works. Today, however, he focuses on works that demonstrate one's obedience to "the law of liberty," which tomorrow's reading will reveal is the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves. Works of love validate one's faith. Paul would later write of "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6). James specifically cites caring for distressed widows and orphans as what characterizes "pure and undefiled religion" (1:27). So glad Heaven's Family does those things!

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