

The Book Of James: Keeping It Real

James 1:1-4

James 1:1

(KJV) James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

(NIV) James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

Before we tackle this timely text, let me say that The Book of James—which has been called the Proverbs of the New Testament—is not an easy, breezy stroll down Grace Avenue! This is the Word of God that cuts to the heart. It wants to know where you and I stand in relation to the truth. What difference is it making in our behaviour, our lifestyle, our relationships, and our faith? And where is the evidence of the difference? You see, James, the half-brother of Jesus, became a Christian after he encountered the resurrected Christ (1 Corinthians 15:7). *Encountered.*

1Corinthians 15:1-11

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.

John 14:6

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

For those who encountered the risen Christ—including James—there was no turning back. And their names, listed in the passage above, would forever be associated with the true Gospel—not just the words, but the transforming power of an encounter with the resurrected Jesus!

I pray that through this study you will encounter the living Christ through His living Word by the power of the Holy Spirit! As you pray and saturate your mind and heart with this text—your way, your truth, your life will *become* Jesus. And this all-encompassing transformation will yield real fruit—or action—that those around you will be able to taste, and see that the Lord is alive and that He is good (Psalm 34:8).

One word of warning: The Book of James is not a doctrinal thesis like Paul's masterwork Romans. No, no, no. James is direct and practical, and will often cause you to examine yourself in the faith:

2Corinthians 13:5

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?

Now the twelve tribes to whom James is writing wouldn't have had a moment to assess and contemplate their walk with the Lord—in light of His sanctification in them—they simply were in it and going through it. God is not one to waste a trial or temptation, though, and so He goes ahead without our permission and allows the pain to produce the perseverance. Beloved, therein is joy—that God loves us enough to allow the storms of life to shape us into the men, women, and children He created us to be!

James 1:2

(KJV) *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;*

(NIV) *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,*

Please don't misunderstand the word joy to mean fleeting happiness—here today, gone tomorrow, depending on how we feel or how favourable our circumstances are. Paul certainly did not find that kind of joy when he penned this:

Philippians 4:11-13

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

No, our joy is the joy of the Lord, which is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). And what we need most when we are in pain—feeling weak physically, emotionally, and spiritually—is God's strength.

We don't diminish or romanticize real pain when it's happening to us. But knowing the truth about God's plan to perfect us in Christ helps us to be grateful instead of grumpy in the hard seasons of life.

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: How will you sow the truth of James 2 into your life at the most practical level?

*STUDY POINT: Find four other New Testament passages where joy was produced from pain.

James 1:3

(KJV) *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.*

(NIV) *because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.*

The end goals of God—what are they, exactly?

Well, perhaps as our character is strengthened in Him, we begin to build the endurance we will need to reach the glorious end, to receive our rewards for faithfulness in our eternal, heavenly home. As I mentioned earlier, God never asks for our permission to shape our character. He simply allows life and its assured partner—trouble—to refine us in due time (Job 5:7). He is faithful to do this:

Philippians 1:6

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

Again, remember that our dear brother James is providing spiritual encouragement for newly converted Jews “scattered abroad” for whom there would have been, at that early stage, *no encouragement*.

James 1:4

(KJV) *But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*

(NIV) *Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

In most pockets of our society—even the church—character development may not rank at the top of our favourite things to pursue or discuss. James 1:4 is a hard sell in the most self-professed holy of communities, who may value observance to the law over genuine transformation of the heart. Ironically, Jews—whom we love and pray for—believe *this is the way* to be right with God.

What then is James alluding to in this verse? Is it slavish adherence to the law in order to be absolutely perfect? According to the purpose of this letter, and the context of the passage—no! God allows trials of many kinds to *undo* the religious constructs in us, for they cannot save us, nor bring us closer to Him (Matthew 15:7-9). However, the living Word taken in, understood, and obeyed in our lives through the power of the Holy Ghost glorifies God. He enables us to say *yes* to Him!

Titus 2:11-12

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

We would do well to meditate on James 1:1-4 this week until it reaches the heart level, the real life level.

Amen.

~ Reverend Darren McClelland