

James Chapter 1A 2017

The home that I grew up in was a home that was filled with the Sound of Music. I mean that literally. My mother was a big fan of the old show tunes from the 60s & 70's.

- The Hills (In North Philly) were alive with the sound of music. Vinyl copies of: Hello Dolly, Bye, Bye Birdy, Fiddler on the Roof filled our house with music that was forever etched into my young impressionable mind.
- Some of these memories came rushing to the front of my mind when I was listening to Allister Begg's introduction to the book of James. Apparently he had a similar upbringing. (*Makes me want to pray for him all the more*)
- Allister spoke of a particular song from the Musical "My Fair Lady." (Which I reluctantly admit I am familiar with) When Eliza Doolittle sings to Freddy.

"Don't talk of stars burning above if you're in love, show me."

"Tell me no dreams, filled with desire, if you're on fire, show me."

"Sing me no song, read me no rhyme, don't waste my time, show me."

My point in sharing these childhood memories is to say that the Book of James might well be considered the "Show Me book" of the Bible.

- Let me explain:
- You say that you have been born of God, you say that Christ is the Lord of your life, you say that you are a new creature in Christ, that the old has past and the new has come; well James says: "Show Me" Prove it by the way that you live!

The over-arching theme that permeates this book of James is this: If indeed you possess a true and living faith then "SHOW ME!"

• Let me see the FRUIT of that new life! Here is an example from Ch. 2:
James 2:18, **But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.**

- In essence James is saying:
- Faith that is real, the gift of faith that God graciously imparts through the hearing of His Word, that same faith which brings life to a dead sinner will always produce good works.
- IMPORTANT, Good Works are not the means by which we are saved. Rather, Good works are the result of or the fruit of God's justifying work in the human heart.
- The Apostle Paul makes this absolutely clear in his letter to the Ephesian believers

Ephesians 2: **8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,** **9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Because the book of James focuses on the FRUIT and not the ROOT of our salvation it is a book that is filled with imperatives. Imperatives are the commands that God gives to his redeemed people.

Let me take just a minute here to explain the difference between an imperative and an indicatives:

- When you read all of those wonderful verses describing the great things that God has done to provide us with salvation the wording is in the indicative mood. Indicatives are statements of fact: Here is an EXAMPLE:

Romans 8: 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

- The words Foreknew, predestined, called, justified, glorified are all indicatives, they indicate what God has done for us.
- The book of Romans is full of indicatives until you reach chapter 12 where you find the first imperative.

Remember, imperatives or commands are used to communicate those things that WE should DO in response to all that God has done.

Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

- Because God called us to himself and justified us through the gift of faith that he provided we should respond by presenting ourselves as a living sacrifice.

The Bible uses commands (imperative) when it speaks of our sanctification because the transforming work of God involves our cooperation.

- I say all of this to make one important point: very simply, the Book of James is a book that deals primarily with the sanctification of those who believe.

This book of James is made up of 108 verses that contain more than 60 imperatives.

- Through those imperatives James teaches us how we should live NOW that we have been Justified by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Here is my outline for the opening verses in James: May want to jot them down:

- A Servant Disposition
- A Strange Delight
- A Strategic Development

1. Servant Disposition

As we might expect, in the opening line of this Epistle the Author identifies both himself as well as those to whom he is writing.

- When WE write a letter we begin with Dear John, Dear Sharon and we wait until the end of the letter to sign our signature. Sincerely or Love Barry
- But in the first century the author of the letter identified himself at the very outset of his writing. We see that practice in just about every New Testament Epistle.

James 1:1, **James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.**

- So the signature at the top of the letter is that of James, we must ask who is James
- There are actually 3 men in the New Testament who bear the name “James.”
 - “James the Less” (younger) the son of Alphaeus
 - “James the son of Zebedee” (Brother of John, sons of thunder)
 - “James the Just” who was the ½ brother of the Lord Jesus and the Chief Elder over the church at Jerusalem.

Tradition has held that the author of this Epistle is “James the Just” the ½ brother of the Lord Jesus.

We know from the Gospels that James was slow to believe in Jesus.

We know from the book of 1 Corinthians that Jesus met with James personally after he rose from the dead.

We know from the book of Acts that James eventually became the chief elder of the church in Jerusalem.

Historians call him “Old Camel Knees James” because he spent so much time kneeling in prayer.

- But I would draw your attention to the way that James describes himself as he writes his Epistle. He introduces himself as **James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ**

He could have said, “James the brother of the Lord Jesus, Son of the Blessed Mother Mary.” OR he could have said “James the chief elder over the church of God at Jerusalem, Bishop over the city of the Living God.

- BUT he chose to identify himself as “A Servant of God.”

You may be familiar with the word that James uses here, it is the word “DULOS.”

- The word would rightly be translated – Slave – Bondman – it describes one who is in a permanent relationship of servitude to another.
- When the word is used metaphorically it speaks of one who gives himself up wholly to the will of another.
 - So it is that James has given himself over to the will of God.

I think it is important that we understand this Servant Disposition is not unique to James, it was put forth by the Lord Jesus himself as the standard of New Testament leadership.

- When the sons of Zebedee brought their mother to the Lord Jesus to lobby for cabinet positions in his upcoming Kingdom He responded to their request with these words:

Matthew 20:25 "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 26 It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,

27 and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, 28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

- True greatness in the Kingdom of God belongs to the one who took upon himself the nature of a servant. (Jesus)
- All those who are being transformed into the image of Christ will at one level of another exhibit this characteristic of servanthood.
- I don't need to tell you that this disposition is completely contrary to the world in which we live.

The gurus of modern society attempt to make people feel better about themselves by assigning more prestigious, more important job titles.

- A trash collector now bears the title "sanitation engineer."
- Those who do their work efficiently become assistant to the assistant co-manager. They don't get any more money but that have a prestigious title.
- What was once called Secretary's Day has been changed to Administrative-Professional's Day and Now it has become Administrative Professional's Week.

Here in the body of Christ that worldly pyramid of power and prestige is turned upside down because the greatest in the Kingdom of God is the Servant of all.

- Before we leave this section I have to ask, in your home, in your church, with your spouse, your children, your brothers and sisters in Christ do you display the servant nature of Christ?
- Moving from verse 1 to verse 2 we transition from a servant disposition to a strange delight.

2. A Strange Delight

James 1:2 **Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,**

- I use the words: "Strange Delight" to describe this verse because JOY is not the natural human response to trials, to hardship or temptation.
- As a matter of fact, we might consider a person somewhat unstable if they respond to hardship or calamity with emotions of joy. (What's with them?)

James commands us to "**Count it all joy!**"

- This word “COUNT” is a verb that describes THOUGHT rather than EMOTION. James is not commanding us as to how we should FEEL but rather how we should THINK about our circumstances. (There is a big difference)

From our vantage point our trials are tragic accidents, gross injustices and it is only natural to respond in sadness or anger.

- But when we work through the trial in our own mind we often respond in Self-pity, We frequently get angry at everyone who was involved, we can even get angry at God.
- But James commands us to consider our trials from God’s point of view, look at our circumstances from His perspective.
- You see, God is able to orchestrate even the most difficult events in our lives so that they will work together for good. (Romans 8:28)
 - That doesn’t necessarily happen immediately, As a matter of fact you may not experience the fullness of that Good in this life.
- We can count it all joy because we know that God has a specific plan for every trial we face.

I think we could compare the joy that we have the midst of trial to a woman who rejoices to learn that she is going to have a baby.

- She knows that she will face months of nausea. Cravings for foods that she simply can’t keep down.
- She will become increasingly uncomfortable; she will struggle to breathe as the baby presses against her diaphragm.
- She will develop back aches as her body tries to compensate for the baby who is pressing on nerves she didn’t even know she had.
- Not to mention the pains of child birth.

BUT somehow by the grace of God she is able to endure the pain for the joy that is set before her.

Of course the greatest example that we have of one who endured hardship and temptation with joy is the Lord Jesus. Remember from our study of Hebrews:

Hebrews 12:2 **looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.**

- I cannot possibly imagine a more difficult trial than the trial that Jesus faced on the cross. Do you remember when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane and he was struck by the weight of the suffering that he was about to endure? What did he say: Mr 14:36 **And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."**

- At the same time when the pressure of the impending cross caused his capillaries to burst so that he sweat drops of blood, he submitted to the Will of the Father which was his greatest joy.

IN the same way whenever we face trials or temptations the path of greatest joy is the path of submission to the will of the Father.

We can maintain a joyful attitude by faith knowing that trials are not liabilities but in the sovereignty of God they are ultimately beneficial and not harmful no matter how destructive or painful the immediate experience may appear to be.

- God is diligently at work in those trials to grow us, transform us from glory to glory. They are a strategic element in our spiritual development.

3. A Strategic Development

James 1: 2 **Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,**

3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- Once again, looking at our trials from God's perspective we find that they are uniquely designed for our benefit.
- God uses our trials as powerful tools in the development of Christ-like Character with in us.
- We know that the testing of our faith will ultimately prove to be beneficial in developing spiritual maturity in our lives.
 - The word that is translated "to know" (*for you know that the testing*) carries the idea of a full understanding that is not based only on facts this word (ginowsko) is a knowledge that comes through personal experience.

Simply reading through the Biblical Narrative you can't help but see how God uses trials to transform His chosen people.

- Abraham – living as a pilgrim... Waiting for the promise of God. Going to war
- Jacob – Wrestling with Esau.. With Laban and finally with God
- Joseph – Rejected by his brothers, cast in a hole, sold into slavery, in prison
- David – Chased by his father in law for 15 years. Many battles with internal and external enemies.
 - BUT Listen to David's cry:

Psalm 40:1 **I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. 2 He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. 3 He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD.**

God allows trials to come into our lives in order to test our faith. NOT because HE needs to know if our faith is real (He knows) we NEED to KNOW

- When TRUE FAITH is tested it GROWS and produces good fruit.

When devastating trials come into your life do you fall on your face and cry out to the Lord. Do you cling to him and to his people in your time of desperation, OR

- Do you take the advice of Job's wife, Do you become bitter and curse God.
- Do you cast your Bible aside and abandon the church when things don't go your way?

I would like to leave you this morning with the words of the Prophet Habakkuk

- The people of Judea had given themselves to the worship of Idols. They defiled the temple of the Lord and God was preparing to come in judgment.
- Babylon was about to invade the land.
- They would decimate the people and destroy the city of Jerusalem.
- After hearing the news of God's impending judgment, Knowing that the land would be destroyed Habakkuk responded:

Habakkuk 3: 17 **Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls,**

18 yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. 19 GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places. To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.

- Habakkuk considered it Pure Joy when he faced a multitude of trials.

In our flesh we think that a life of joy is a life that is free from every trial, void of all hardship.

- God invites us to share in His JOY in the midst of our trials. The joy of KNOWING that the One who is sovereign over all things is diligently at work in every circumstance shaping and molding us into the image of Christ.
- Yes the experience is PAINFUL and the road is LONG but in the end it will all be worth it when you hear those words: “

Mt 25:21 **'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'**