

## **James 1 - The Trials and Truth of the Way!**

D Reeve - Nov 2020

### **Intro**

James dates to about AD45 and was probably the first NT book to be written.

James was the Lord's brother - there were 4 James in the NT - son of Zebedee; son of Alphaeus ('James the less' - one of the 12); father of Judas the apostle and the Lord's brother (Gal 1:-19; Matt 13:-55). It seems that James was not a believer during the Lord's earthly ministry but was converted at the appearance of the risen Lord (1 Cor 15:-7). He became a leader in the early church (Acts 15) and was known as 'James the Just'.

There are some 22 references to the Lord's 'Sermon on the Mount' including the beatitudes (Blessed are the ...) in this little book.

James is a series of pithy statements - a string of pearls rather than a train of thought - the truth presented in graphic and dramatic forms - should be pondered deeply as separate challenges for our daily lives.

### **Detail - Ch1**

V1- James - a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ - Why mention both here? Maybe James needs to point out or re-emphasize to the Jews that the **Jewish Jehovah and Messiah Jesus are one**. NB. not brother but servant - James leaves others to call him 'the brother of the Lord'.

Written to the 12 scattered tribes (dispersed Jews living outside of Palestine) but especially to **Christian Jews** - ie mainly Jewish **but is it?** Challenge - try to find the teachings/doctrines here that are for Jews only - then please let me know because what I see is for **all believers**. Just because James wrote to the 12 tribes, doesn't mean that what he said is for them only - like most of the Bible - we can find direct applications for us today all through the wonderful, God-breathed book! These Jews were now Christians following Jesus just like us - part of the Church (the bride of Christ) and so, the teachings are directly for us today too.

V2- Count it **all joy** (every kind of joy) to fall into diverse temptations - early apostles were beheaded, crucified upside down, injured, beaten, jailed, starved etc. - but James said it was **a joy!** ie. The advantage of adversity - can you picture yourself in this and be enjoying your own deep trials? This is where the 'rubber hits the road' - really! - seems impossible to me and maybe to you too. **Joy in deep trials and temptations - Wow! and How?**

V3 - Trying, **testing of our faith** - patience = endurance developed through opposition and difficulty. Without the trials, we just don't grow - (like without mistakes, we just don't learn) + it is part of our identification with the **suffering Saviour**. We should expect trials and temptations because we belong to Him.

V4 - **Christian maturity** - fully developed, without defects and lacking in nothing - **Is this one of the key goals of the Christian life?** - Worth far more than riches and fame. It shows the real purpose of our trials and temptations - not 'a bed of roses' but a real struggle with great purpose - to be more like Christ.

V5 - **The want of wisdom** - ask of God (pray for it) - He always will give according to His divine will - **He gives liberally** - maybe not exactly what we asked for but what is best for us. In this case He gives us the wisdom we need. NB. God does not reproach those who come to Him often to request wisdom.

V6 - **BUT - Ask in faith - nothing wavering** - it is a very hard thing to **fully believe** - no hesitation, no doubting. James says that if we doubt, we are just like a driven wave in the sea - tossed about - no stability - directionless. It may be this doubt that is stopping our progress - takes trust, commitment, determination, grit etc.

V7 - **Warning - If we doubt, we won't receive** - simple but tough! We must not even think (assume) God will act, if we doubt - He won't! God is not fooled - not ever - he knows us through and through - if He senses that we are not genuinely convinced that He is able, then, **our requests are absolutely futile.**

V8 - **Double minded** = 'Mr or Mrs Facing two ways' see Matt 6:-24 - cannot serve two Masters - unstable, restless, staggering to and fro like a drunken man.

V9 - **The transient treasure** - brother of low degree or brother in humble circumstances - not affluent etc. **but** can boast of his/her riches in their spiritual position in Christ (glory in their high and exalted estate) - chosen, special, His children etc. What we have is certain, secure, everlasting, satisfying compared to earthly treasure that decays.

V10,11 - Here is a strange one - the rich believer should boast when he/she is 'brought down a peg!' Really - yes really - do not see this happen much. We had a good Christian friend who was a director of a large commercial company and he told us that it was very difficult for him to 'forget his earthly position when he came to church' - he struggled - **but**, it was a **joy to us** to see this brother trying his hardest to be humble and level with street kids (for example). He knew that his wealth would fade 'like the flower of grass' and 'wither in the sun' cf Prov 8:-18, 2 Cor 4:-18 and Jesus - 'For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.' Riches are transient - may lose or have to leave them.

V12 - '**Blessed** is the man/woman (ex Sermon on the Mount) who endures temptation → Reward = **crown of life** after being tried (approved, standing the test) - 1Thess 2:-19 - crown of rejoicing - how worthwhile and we should aim for this and keep it in mind when we are tempted. Heb 2:-18 - Jesus can help us in temptations (because He has been there and won). This is the **triumph through temptation**. It can be a huge battle **but** the victory prize is fantastic and Jesus has promised it to those who love Him. If our mind is occupied with Christ and His work, temptations will flee from us.

V13 - **Please don't blame God** for your temptations or trials. We often ask Him - **Why God?** God is not in the business of tempting anyone. No one tempts to evil who has not been, first himself, tempted by it and God cannot be tempted. Rather God will try us (not tempt) and not with any evil intent but blessings after.

V14 - **We are tempted when we** are drawn away with lust = desires, including desires for safety, riches, ease, sensual pleasure - drawn away - enticed. James does not say **here** that the devil (Satan) is the tempter but we know this is indeed the devil's business (eg temptation of Jesus).

V15 - The result of yielding to temptation is terrible - lust (desire) → conceived → sin → death. This verse builds on v14 - desire produces sin/death - the father of this is obviously the devil - don't forget Jesus conquered both sin and death!

V16 - James personal plea to them and to us - '**Do not be misled, my beloved brothers**'. Do not be deceived (like a ship driven off-course).

V17 - **The gifts from God** - they are all **good and perfect** and they come from '**the Father of lights**' - creator of the heavenly bodies and changeless God - no variation ever - not even a shadow of turning - absolutely dependable and constant.

V18 - **God's own will** - treat with utmost respect - we have no right to ever question His will. But rejoice in the fact that His will **gave us the new birth** (1 Pet 1:-23) - by His **Word of Truth** and the work of His Holy Spirit (Eph 1:-13, Col 1:-5). Kind of first fruits = description of early Christians (Rom 16:-5, 1 Cor 16:-15). Be careful here not to over-emphasize God's will versus our free will - both are true, even if we cannot fully understand (being finite and mortal).

V19, 20 - **The wrong of wrath - Excellent advice here - be swift to hear** (be a good listener), **slow to speak** (without hastily rushing in like a bull at the gate - count to 10 before opening our mouths - fools rush in where angels fear to tread) and **slow to wrath** (not easily provoked - anger can well up so quickly - sometimes even completely misinterpreting what the other person has said or meant).

What a tremendous difference between the **wrath of man and the righteousness of God!** God weighs up everything and administers perfect judgment - we don't and our judgments are often based on wrath and passion making fair and just decisions impossible.

V21 - Again, a dramatic description is used here - the comparison of **our natural behavior versus the influence of God's Word in our lives**. Lay apart (get rid of - take it off like a filthy garment Is 64:-6 and Zech3:-4. The superfluity of naughtiness or overflowing of wickedness is a carry-over of our pre-conversion days. This should be replaced by a humble spirit to receive God's Word and that is able to save (similar to V18) our souls. ie an act of our wills to **throw out the old and take in the new**.

V22-25 - Here is yet another pungent instruction from James - Be **doers** of the word if we '**hear and not do**', we are just deceiving ourselves (Matt 7:-24-29 and Luke 11:-28). We should add to every sermon the words → '**Do something about it!**' James illustrates this via the mirror - we look and then forget - just a glance and off we go! (maybe if we looked longer and properly, the mirror would **crack**.) **But**, if we look deeply (a fixed gaze) into God's Word, the perfect law of liberty (which is also a mirror - quick and powerful Heb 4:-12) and this look continues (never stops - NB re our daily quiet time devotions etc.), then this person **will be blessed as a doer that acts**.

V26, 27 - **Warning about mere religion** - make perfectly sure that you are saved. James emphasizes that this is not a show of devoutness (like 'Holy Joes') but a real zealous worshipper. The reality of true (pure) religion - what is it? - **The doer of the Word does 3 things:-**

- **controls his speech (bridles the tongue)**
- **performs deeds of charity (visiting orphans and widows)**
- **lives a life of personal holiness (keep themselves from worldly contamination).**

**What a challenge for each of us today?**

So go back through each point and apply the thoughts and challenges of James to your own life and experience and **do something about it!**

And this is just Chapter 1 - James has much, much more to tell us and we will (DV) look at more of it later.