

LESSON TWO

JAMES & JUDE

James 1:1-13

Notes On the Epistle of James

Chapter One

1. Salutation. 1:1.

A. James describes himself by the only title wherein lies his only honor and his only glory – the slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Remember that James was the half-brother of Jesus.

a. They had grown up together; James had spent more time with Jesus than most people, over thirty years in the same family.

b. Wouldn't that information have been important to his readers? People are generally more concerned with whom we know than they are with what we know – and James certainly knew Jesus more intimately than any of his readers.

2. He could have used that information to impress his audience with his “credentials,” but he chose to impress them with Jesus Christ.

3. Moreover, James was a respected leader in the early church; eventually he would preside over the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15); He was the E.F. Hutton of his day – when he spoke the church listened.

4. I wonder how I would have begun the letter if I had been writing it; on our resumes we usually include every honor that we even came close to receiving, rarely playing down our accomplishments and some have gotten into trouble for lying on their resume.

5. James did not begin that way – he humbly calls himself a slave, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, to whom he ascribed his full Messianic title; James had no questions about the deity of Jesus Christ; he knew that Jesus was God's son.

B. His conclusions about life were reflected in the word “bond slave” used to describe his relationship to Christ.

1. It carried with it in James' day the concepts of absolute obedience, absolute brokenness and humility, and absolute loyalty.

2. Obedient; broken; loyal – such adjectives are not what most of us would choose to describe ourselves when opening a letter to a huge group of men and women, most of whom we had probably never met.

2. In his attitude toward trials and temptations. 1:2-18.

A. James words are tough medicine that is hard to swallow; they run contrary to what we really want. Thus, James wants them to know that he talks to them as family – “Brethren.”

1. A trial or test is an experience allowed by a sovereign God to enter into our lives that can have good consequences.

a. They can measure our progress toward Christ likeness.

b. They can hasten the development of a Christ like character in us.

2. What does God want from us when things get tough?

a. James says we are to consider it all joy, or pure joy *whenever* we fall into various kinds of trial.

b. Tough times are inevitable, even though the modern trend in the church is to present the abundant life in Jesus as a fun-packed adventure, guaranteeing health, wealth, and prosperity.

c. I have a book in my library by J.I. Packer entitled “Hot Tub Religion” in which he discusses this approach.

3. God never promises that the Christian life is a hot-tub laid back, undemanding journey; he guarantees the opposite, 2 Tim. 3:12, and then commands us to consider each heartache and each trial to be pure joy.

B. What is pure joy, and what does it mean to deem trials and tests pure joy?

1. It does not mean that every time tough times hit we plaster big smiles on our faces and show everyone how spiritual we are by holding back the tears.

a. God doesn't expect us to exclaim cheerfully, "O good, I lost my job. My mother has Parkinson's disease and my husband is seeing another woman. I am so happy." God isn't even suggesting that we "grin and bear it."

b. God isn't looking for steel-clad saints who refuse to feel, who deny their sorrows, who never own up to their struggles.

c. God is looking for us to reach the point in our walk with Him where we can have joy in the midst of the fiery furnace, financial disaster, debilitating illness, or family tragedy.

i. This joy is not a show of phony happiness or false bravado; it is a genuine peace, a right attitude, a heart of contentment, an honest submission to the Father.

ii. It requires total trust in what He is doing in our lives; it is the joy of expectation and anticipation regarding the outcome. Job 13:15.

iii. It is the confidence that Paul affirmed in Rom. 8:18.

d. Real joy is the result of what is on the inside; it has nothing to do with what is happening on the outside; it can be found only in Christ and not in our circumstances.

i. When we come to Jude we will hear, "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, 25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen." Jude 1:24-25.

ii. Jesus said, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." John 15:11.

e. It is important to note that James did not tell us to be joyful *for* those trials, but to be joyful *as* we fall into them.

i. "Fall into" is the same word that Jesus used to describe what happened to the man who "fell among" thieves on the Jericho Road (Luke 10:30).

ii. Our trials treat us as the robbers treated that man - they surround envelop, pummel and pound us; they draw blood and tears.

f. But why the crucible? How can we be joyful in the midst of hassles, pain, and sorrows?

i. This gets back to the question about why bad things happen to good people.

ii. Even as Christians we may not have taken the time to understand this question.

A. Having been trained in the health and wealth gospel we wonder what we have done to deserve his disfavor; we feel abandoned; we assume that Satan has gotten the upper hand, and his demons are at work.

B. Let us hit the canvass a few times and we conclude that God must be mad at us.

1. When suffering happens to others we conclude that they must have done something wrong; God has zapped them; they are getting what they deserve.

2. A divorce? You must have failed to be a godly husband or wife; God is going to let you have it.

3. You have been compromising; God is reaching down to mash you.

4. We may not say it, but deep within our heart don't we sometimes think it? Job's friends surely did.

C. The fact is that the *why* of the matter has nothing to do with our personal conduct, unless our personal conduct is accompanied by certain results such as cirrhosis of the liver or DUI caused death.

1. The basic why of the problem is the fact that we live in a fallen world marred by sin and a present world filled with sin.

2. When the results of a fallen world strike they make no distinctions based upon race or culture, believer or unbeliever.

3. God does not send them to us or place them upon us; the work of God does not begin until we have fallen into them, and then He uses them to strengthen us and make us more Christ like. If we trust in Him and His ultimate purpose for our life we will come through the fire or the valley, whichever figure you prefer, more fit for the kingdom.

4. This is especially true when we suffer those ills that fall only upon the faithful children of God – those things that we suffer as a Christian according to Peter. 1 Peter 4:16.

5. Immediately before that verse (vv. 12-15), Peter wrote, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. 14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. 16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” 1 Peter 4:12-16.

2. Let us never underestimate the power of the ills of life and their own potentiality for evil.

a. The ills of life that many are called upon to endure can wear down the most courageous spirit and break the stoutest heart.

b. Those to whom James wrote had to face hostility, ostracism, and persecution because of their allegiance to Christ; the reality of their faith would be tested to the hilt.

c. Every inducement would be presented to them to give up the struggle and to renounce their profession of Christianity.

d. That was the severest of the temptations confronting them – as it remains for every believer through all the ages.

C. What is the result of successfully passing through our trials?
(v. 4)

1. The testing of your faith produces steadfastness (more than our understanding of patience). 1:3.

a. James refers to the experience of having your faith put to the test.

1. It is an only-too-often repeated fact that such faith as we possess collapses before the storm of sorrow, or pain, or disappointment, or whatever it may be.

2. We say that we believe in God as our Father, but as long as our faith remains untested on the point our belief falls short of steady conviction.

3. But suppose the day comes – as it does and will – when circumstances seem to mock our faith, when the cruelty of life seems to deny His fatherliness, his silence calls in question His almightiness and the sheer, haphazard, meaningless jumble of events challenges the possibility of a Creator’s ordering hand.

4. It is in this way that life’s trials test our faith for genuineness.

b. James insists that we *know* that the testing will result in strong consistency or steadfastness.

1. Does it not work that way at work?

2. Does it not work that way in marriage?

3. Does it not work that way in school?

2. James, as God’s emissary, wants us to be less fluctuating in our loyalty and less erratic in our conduct: let steadfastness have its perfect work that you may be entire, lacking nothing. v. 4.

a. The Christian goal is to be complete.

1. The word is used of the animal that is fit to be sacrificed to God and the priest who is fit to serve him.

2. There are no disfiguring or disqualifying blemishes.

3. Gradually this unswerving constancy removes the weaknesses and imperfections from a man's character.

4. Daily it enables him to conquer old sins, to shed old blemishes and to gain new virtues, until in the end he becomes entirely fit for the service of God and of his fellow man.

b. It makes him wanting or lacking in nothing.

1. The word is used of the defeat of an army, of the giving up of a struggle, or the failure to reach a standard that should have been reached.

2. If a man meets his testing in the right way, if day by day he develops this unswerving constancy, day by day he will live more victoriously and reach nearer to the standard of Jesus Christ himself.

D. How are we to achieve this high goal? vv. 5-8.

1. James anticipates that his readers, having heard the challenge, will now ask, "Where can I get the wisdom and understanding to use these testing experience in the right way?" His answer is, "ask God for it."

2. To understand James answer we must answer three questions that are raised in these verses.

a. What is wisdom?

i. Jesus grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52), and during his ministry people marveled at his wisdom and wondered where he got it (Matt. 13:54).

ii. Moses was educated in the wisdom of the Egyptians (Acts 7:22).

iii. In those verses, as generally, wisdom has a very general meaning; Moses was an educated man; Jesus impressed people as being a learned person.

iv. But it is plain from many other passages the word has a much more specialized meaning than this.

v. The wisdom of Solomon was “practical sagacity,” the ability to apply what he knew to the problems of life.

vii. Jesus promised his disciples that at times of trial they would be given “a mouth and wisdom” (Luke 21:15), that is, an ability to speak appropriately to the situation.

viii. Another side of wisdom is exemplified in 1 Cor. 1:21, the wisdom that sees the meaning and significance of things.

a. If we say of someone that he knows his Bible well, we have described a knowledgeable person.

b. But if he also knows how to use his Bible to understand life and the world around him, and to guide his own conduct and the conduct of others in the maze of life’s problems, knowledge has passed over into wisdom. See James 3:13-17 where James discusses the wisdom that is from above.

b. What does James say about God?

i. Whoever lacks wisdom can ask of God and he will receive it.

a. Such simplicity is either totally unrealistic, or else finds its justification in what is known about God; for James it is the latter.

b. His doctrine of God is such that he can afford to make large promises in His name with the knowledge that those promises will be honored.

ii. He teaches us:

a. That God’s nature is to give.

1. He writes literally, “let him ask from the giving God”; the requirements of English taking into consideration the additional matters that James adds, make it difficult to literally translate.

2. No one attribute expresses all that is true about God, but each attribute expresses something about God that is true all of the time; you need not fear that when you ask God for wisdom

He will ask you to come back tomorrow because He is not the giving God today.

b. That God's bounty is unrestricted.

i. God's giving knows no earthly limitation; his gifts are available to all of his children.

ii. God's giving knows no heavenly limitation; He gives generously or liberally. Without going into a Greek discussion suffice it to say that God gives with a mind set solely upon this task as if he had nothing else to do but to give and give again.

c. God's welcome never fails; he gives without reproaching. Our giving is often spoiled and made a burden to the recipient because we will never forget the gift and we make sure that the recipient will never forget it either.

c. What does James teach about prayer?

i. God is a giving God; do we want to go forward with God?

a. Are we wholeheartedly committed to his way of seeing things and his ambitions for our future?

b. Or are we keeping a door open for the world? Are we trying to have a foot in each camp? God's mind is clear; but are we double-minded? Faith is our absolute confidence that He will give what we ask; doubting is our own inner uncertainty about whether we really want him to give or not.

ii. When we doubt:

a. The power of prayer is vitiated.

b. There is an instability that affects the whole of a person's life – unstable in all his ways; there is an instability of character that shows itself in all of life's experiences, smooth or rough.