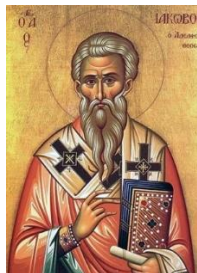


Sermon: James - Trials and Temptations

Readings : James 1 :2-18 and Galatians 5 :7-8



This morning, we are starting a series of sermons looking at the book of James. A short book consisting of 5 chapters.

As we start this series it is important to look at the author and the context in which this letter was written.

The author identifies himself as James as he opens this letter:

“1 James. a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.”

It is accepted that this James was brother of Jesus.

James the disciple and the brother of John and the son of Zebedee was the first disciple to be martyred in 44 AD,¹ too early to have written this book which was written between 45 and 50 AD.

The other two persons named James referred to in the New Testament had neither the stature nor the influence to have written this letter.²

We find this reference in Matthew where we read³ this question about Jesus: “... aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?”

James was at first an unbeliever.⁴ In John⁵ we read that “...even his brothers did not believe in him (Jesus).”

James became a believer after Jesus appeared to him and then to all the apostles⁶ in the forty-day period after the resurrection of Jesus.

James was in the upper room in Jerusalem praying with his mother and the rest of the disciples⁷ and was presumably present at Pentecost. What else do we know about James?

- Paul called James a “pillar” of the church.⁸
- He became the leader of the early church when Peter was released from prison.⁹
- He was a leader in the important Council of Jerusalem in 49 AD.¹⁰

¹ [Acts 12:1-2](#)

² Introduction to James NIV Study Bible page 1878

³ [Matthew 13:55](#)

⁴ James – a faith that works, a book by R Kent Hughes at page 16.

⁵ [John 7:5.](#)

⁶ [1 Corinthians 15:7](#)

⁷ Acts 1:13

⁸ Galatians 2:9.

⁹ Acts 12:17

¹⁰ [Acts 15: 1-19, 21:18, Galatians 1:19,2:9,12](#)

- Jude could identify himself simply as “a brother of James” so well known was James.¹¹

James became known as James the Just, a man of intense piety. He also gained the nickname of “Old camel knees” because of calluses built up from many years of determined praying.

He was a humble man. As he introduces himself, he doesn’t give his title as son of Mary and brother of Jesus but as “a servant of God”.

Who was he writing to? We read that his letter was addressed to “the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.”

This scattering began in 722 BC when the Assyrians deported the ten northern tribes and continued later when the southern tribes were taken captive by the Babylonians in 586 BC.¹²

In Acts 11:19 we read:

“The Church in Antioch. 19 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews.”

At Pentecost we read that persons who were present were:

“9 Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome 11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs.”¹³

The dispersion was extremely widespread.

These Jewish Christians were refused protection by the Jewish community and were in fact rejected and persecuted by them. In addition, these Jewish Christians were exploited by the Gentiles. They were treated as religious, social, and economic outcasts having no status save that of a slave.

We have pictures on the international television news every day of refugees around the world fleeing persecution seeking a new existence with nothing except hunger, fear and desperation.

James as pastor to the early church writes to encourage his dispersed people in the face of their difficulties and persecution.

This letter is intensely practical with the theme that faith that is real, will produce good works and will be reflected in the lifestyles of believers. The Letter of James has been described as wisdom literature. Eugene Peterson wrote this:

“Deep and living wisdom is on display here, wisdom both rare and essential. Wisdom is not primarily knowing the truth, although it certainly includes that, it is skill in living. For what good is truth if we don’t know how to live it. What good is an intention if we don’t know how to sustain it?”¹⁴

Against this brief background let us start with the first 7 verses of James chapter 1.

James jumps right in:

“2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,”

¹¹ Jude 1:1

¹² Hughes page 17.

¹³ Acts 2:9-11.

¹⁴ Eugene Peterson in the Introduction to James in The Message.

An author writes that if one put this up on a billboard next to highway people might well think this was done by a crazed fanatic.¹⁵

What does James mean? It will be helpful to start with what James does not mean. He is not saying that we are to enjoy the trials we will face or that trials are joy. He is also not saying be happy, force a feeling of joy into yourself behind a fixed smile.

Let us rewind. James doesn't say "if we face trials" he says whenever we face trials and temptations.

Jesus warned his disciples about this as he warns us.¹⁶

33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

What is the joy that James is talking about? He is talking of the joy of our faith.

In 1 Peter 1 we read this which explains what is meant:

"Praise to God for a Living Hope

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ... 6 In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

"Consider it pure joy ..."

Eugene Peterson paraphrases verse 2 like this:

"Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests or challenges come at you from all sides. ... under pressure your faith-life shows its true colours."

What seems like a totally irrational call is made rational through Christ.

James takes this further when he writes:

"3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

There is a spiritual value in being tested. It takes grit to persevere but as we prevail our faith is developed.

So what James is saying is brace your self for the trials and temptations that will come and embrace these with peace and joy through the living hope that you have in the resurrection of Jesus.

Let your peace and ability to face these trials do their refining work on you so that your dynamic faith will grow.

This theme is repeated in verse 12 where we read:

¹⁵ Hughes page 18.

¹⁶ John 16:33.

“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.”¹⁷

What awaits you, no matter what this world may push at you, is the crown of eternal life.¹⁸

And don't be distracted by anyone or diverted by trials as you continue on your journey of faith. Paul asks this question:¹⁹

“7 You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? 8 That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you.”

What are you to do when someone cuts in on you or you don't know how to continue in the face of trials and temptations?

Firstly, read James 1: 13-18.

“13 When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.”

“Tempted” here means temptations that test our moral strength to resist sin.

For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;

As Paul said this kind of persuasion – temptation – does not come from God, the one who calls you. Satan tempts us to make us fall.

In Exodus and Deuteronomy, we read that God may test us to confirm our faith²⁰ or to prove our commitment.²¹

So, where then does temptation come from?

14 but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.

James points out that temptation comes from within.

Each of us until we are redeemed has a bent toward evil.

Temptation is not sin. But it can be attractive, inviting, exciting. It calls for us to come a little closer. Don't give in but just touch, taste try – why not, it can't do you any harm.

You are near the edge of the precipice. Why not just go a little closer, right to the edge and peep down into the valley of desolation?

15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”

“Lust gets pregnant, and has a baby: sin! Sin grows up to adulthood, and becomes a real killer.”²²

¹⁷ See also [Philippians 3:12-15](#)

¹⁸ Revelation 2:10, 1 Corinthians 9:25, 2 Timothy 4:8

¹⁹ Galatians 5:7-8.

²⁰ Exodus 20:20. Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.”

²¹ Deuteronomy 8:2. Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

²² From the Message James 1:15

In the Lord's prayer: "Lead us not into temptation!" When temptation comes, don't go to the edge of the precipice. Draw a line 20 meters from the edge and don't go beyond that. Turn around. Call for help.

This is the second step.

You are to come before God in prayer and to ask for guidance.

God will be understanding and not condescending.

Ask for help. And you are to do so boldly and without doubt or second thoughts.

Don't be tossed around like wind blown waves. Describing here a storm on the Sea of Galilee where there are no regular waves like in the ocean but where storms arise the wind blows irregular waves in every direction.

What are you to hold onto when facing trials and temptations?

Hold onto your assured hope in the risen Christ.

Remember always that you are not alone. The Holy Spirit walks with you. You are surrounded by your brothers and sisters on the way. Call on Graham and the elders for help, prayer, and strength. Call on your brothers and sisters to listen to your challenges and to pray with you.

Hold onto your living hope and not onto anything else.

James warns against considering that wealth is the answer.

Eugene Peterson paraphrases verses 9 and 10 like this.

"When down-and-outers get a break, cheer! And when the arrogant rich are brought down to size, cheer! Prosperity is as short-lived as a wild flower, so don't ever count on it."

The directions from James are clear. We as believers in humble circumstances are to glory in our high position, transformed with Christ as our Lord and Saviour, called to the true riches and adopted as an heir and child of God.

And those relying on their material possessions are to glory in being humbled by trials revealing their human frailty moving them to the knowledge that true riches are to be found in the grace of God.²³

In his sermon last week Graham described responses he received when doing door to door evangelism in a wealthy suburb in Cape Town.

One person said: "Why don't you go to the township – they need God more". Another person invited them in to show them her home and her wealth and asked: "Do you think I need God?"

Graham pointed out that when Jesus said to His disciples ... "Truly I tell you, it is hard for persons who are rich to enter the kingdom of heaven" this was not because of their wealth but because they depend more on their wealth ... than they do on Jesus Christ ... a very sad reality in the society in which we live in today.

James concludes this section in verses 17 and 18, pointing out that far from tempting us to evil God showers blessings on his people, God who is the Father of the heavenly lights and who does not change like shifting shadows.

"He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created."

²³ Drawing on these verses in the Amplified Bible.

“In his goodness he chose to make us his own children by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his choice possession.”²⁴

God loves you, unconditionally, just as you are. And as you live as a follower of Christ, God has joy in you. Nehemiah wrote: “The joy of the Lord is your strength”. Draw on this strength to find joy whenever you face trials.

So, what are we take out of these instructions from James?

I believe it is this.

1. We will all face trials in this life. Some minor and some so difficult it seems impossible to move ahead.
2. We will all face temptations in this life. Know that these are not from God. Draw a line in the sand and don't advance passed that line.
3. Turn to God in bold prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen you, to sustain you, to guide you and to carry you through the trials and to keep you from temptation.
4. Call on your fellow believers to come alongside you and to sustain you.

Kent Hughes records how a Presbyterian Minister, Lloyd Ogilvie facing the worst year of his life with his wife having multiple surgeries and treatment for cancer and difficulties in his ministry wrote this as discouragement assaulted his feelings:²⁵

“The greatest discovery that I have made in the midst of all the difficulties is that I can have joy when I can't feel like it - artesian joy. When I had reason to feel beaten, I felt joy. In spite of everything, God gave me the conviction of being loved and the certainty that nothing could separate me from him. It was not happiness, gush, or jolliness, but a constant flow of the Spirit through me. At no time did he give me the easy confidence that everything would work out as I wanted it on my timetable, but that he was in charge and would give me and my family enough courage for each day: grace. Joy is always the result of that.”

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²⁴ From the Amplified Bible.

²⁵ Hughes pages 18-19, quoting Lloyd, John Ogilvie, *Drumbeat of Love*.