

James 25-03-30b

We continue our study here in the opening verse of what in our English Bible is the book of James. It is the letter of Jacob, who I believe in my heart of hearts is the younger brother of John, the sainted apostle John, and son of Zebedee, for reasons that I think will become evident as we continue. We're in Galatians, looking at chapter 2, Paul has detailed his interactions with those in Jerusalem, the leadership in the Jerusalem church.

When he goes there, he sees Peter and the Lord's brother James is there as well. And James seems to be endeavoring to take charge of his area and to know who's coming and who's going and to have a say in the affairs. Seems to me it would have been sufficient for Paul to have visited Peter, possibly John, after his three-year sojourn in Arabia.

But for whatever reason, the Jerusalem James gets insinuated into that meeting. Then 14 years go by, and then in verse 11 of Galatians chapter 2, Paul says now when Peter had come to Antioch, let me back up to verse 9 of chapter 2, James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me. They gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship.

We go to the Gentiles, they to the circumcised. Division of responsibility. Those in Jerusalem minister the gospel of Jesus Christ to those of the circumcision, those who belong to Israel.

Paul and his associate Barnabas will go to the Gentiles. Verse 10, they desired only that we should remember the poor. This is why I wanted to back up a verse.

They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do. Put a mental sticky note by that concern. They desired only that we should remember the poor.

What poor do you think those in Jerusalem are concerned with? The poor throughout the Roman Empire, the poor in Rome, the poor in Antioch, the poor in Ephesus or Philippi, it's the poor in Jerusalem, right? This is an oppressed area and after 14 years, there is now a famine in the land. This is a subject that has not received a whole lot of attention, but if you look at the situation, this was actually predicted by the prophet Agabus. Agabus predicted this and said that there would be a famine.

This is back in Acts chapter 11, verse 27, you can flip over to that, keep your finger in Galatians, but go back to Acts chapter 11 and you will see there Peter in the first part of the chapter telling those of the circumcision about his vision of the sheet let down, arise Peter, kill and eat. Verse 17 of Acts 11, Peter says, If therefore God gave them the same gift He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they became silent. They glorified God, saying, Then God has also granted the Gentiles repentance with a view toward life.

Verse 19, Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. No one but the Jews only. Some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene.

When they had come to Antioch, they spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. News of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem.

And they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, encouraged them all, that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. Remember Barnabas, son of encouragement? This is his gift and that's what he does, he encourages them to continue.

He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and a great many people were added to the Lord. Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. Saul, in the meantime, after his three-year sojourn in Arabia, his visit to Jerusalem to see Peter and Jerusalem James, had departed and had gone home to Tarsus.

So Barnabas heard that he was there and went to find him. Barnabas says, this thing with the Gentiles is heating up and we have heard that the Lord has commissioned Saul to be the apostle to the Gentiles, we need to go get him. This I think is a really inspired move on Barnabas' part.

Let's find the one that the Lord Jesus has commissioned to undertake this work because we are finding Gentiles in Antioch and elsewhere starting to turn to the Lord. We need Saul's insight. Saul also called Paul.

So Barnabas goes to get him. Verse 26, when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people and the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch, Christianoi in Greek.

Now look at verse 27, in those days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. I say again, prophets who are in Jerusalem, these are New Testament believers in the Lord Jesus with the gift of prophecy, don't have a New Testament corpus yet.

These individuals leave Jerusalem and go to Antioch following the trail of Barnabas. One of them named Agabus stood up and showed by the spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. The disciples each according to his ability determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea.

Remember when Paul said they had a concern for the poor in Galatians chapter 2 and Paul said I shared that concern. So these prophets come and say there's going to be a famine, we've already got poor people in Jerusalem, it's only going to get worse. Notice the response, what

happened here? The word of the Lord comes from Jerusalem to Antioch.

It didn't come through Paul, it didn't come through Barnabas. Prophets from Jerusalem come up, Agabus who is a worthy prophet by every measure says there is going to be a famine everywhere. This is world means the Roman Empire, this worldwide famine.

This is an empire wide shortage and there are abundant testimonies to this in secular Greek records. This famine is mentioned by Josephus in his Antiquities of the Jews. He mentions that Queen Helena of Adiabene, she's a Jewish proselyte, she bought grain and figs.

She got the grain in Egypt, she got the figs in Cyprus and she imported them. She paid for them herself and sent them to Jerusalem for the relief of the people there. Josephus says her coming was a very great advantage to the people of Jerusalem whereas a famine did oppress them at that time, many people died for want of what was necessary to procure food.

Queen Helena sent some of her servants to Alexandria with money to buy a great quantity of corn. This is not yellow corn, this is corn in the old English sense of food, to buy food. And others of them to Cyprus to bring a cargo of dried figs.

That's Antiquities of the Jews 20 to 5 if you want to look it up. This famine is also mentioned by the Venerable Bede, B-E-D-E, in his history of the English Church. He says the Emperor Claudius was the first Roman Emperor to land in Britain since Julius Caesar came to quell a revolt and to bring Britain under the rule of Rome.

Bede says this campaign was in the fourth year of his reign and in the 46th year after the birth of Jesus. So mid A.D. 40s and if you think about Paul on the road to Damascus sometime in the early to mid 30s, 14 years later it's going to be in the mid to late 40s A.D., A.D. 40 something. So fourth year of his reign, 46th year after the birth of Jesus, the same year as the famine.

This was the year in which a very serious famine occurred in Syria mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles as having been foretold by the Prophet Agabus. That's what the Bede says. And Suetonius also describes, we've got a lot more information about this famine from secular history than we have a lot of other things in which we are more interested.

But notice that as a result of this famine and knowledge that there were people dying of starvation in Jerusalem, where is the impetus? Here's the point, listen carefully, prophets come, there's going to be a famine by the word of the Lord. Why does God send this word to Antioch? He doesn't say and therefore you need to take up a collection. Agabus doesn't say set by on the first day of the week and make a collection and I'll take it back down to Jerusalem.

What is the message of Agabus? There is a need. It's hitting Jerusalem, it's going to hit everywhere. It is left to the hearers to decide what to do.

Agabus gives no instructions, gives no command, makes no suggestions. He simply says big famine is coming, it's going to hit the whole empire, right? That's what happens. So in Galatians

chapter 2, when they are supposed to keep in mind the poor, Paul says I was happy to do that.

I was happy to exceed in that. This is without any interference from Jerusalem James. God sends his prophets to Antioch, they say there's a famine coming and the people in Antioch respond.

So that is Acts chapter 11 in verse 28, this famine is coming, so verse 29, the disciples each according to his ability determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. Like Queen Helena, they said I have heard of this need, I've got some resources, I would like to send and meet this need. This they did, they sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Antioch initiates, the people in Antioch say let's get together and send a gift, we'll give it to Barnabas and Saul. And about that time is when James is slain, Jacob, who I believe is the author of our letter, that's 12, 1 and 2. About that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. He killed Jacob, the brother of John with the sword.

Because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also during the days of unleavened bread. I cover this to point out that there is a right, proper and God-glorifying way in which the needs of the poor in Jerusalem were met. God made the need known through His prophets with no further instructions.

People are starving in Jerusalem, the people in Antioch on their own initiative and as a response to that news decided they would get together, put a gift together and send it by the hand of Barnabas and Saul. And that's what they did. Nothing at all wrong with that.

However, what happens later, during Paul's third missionary journey, Paul is going to write the letter of 1 Corinthians in AD 53. This is going to be half a dozen years later, six to ten years later. Paul is going to write to Corinth.

And if you turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 16, Acts Romans 1 Corinthians, read what Paul says here. Concerning collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also. I've given instructions for you to take up a collection for the need of the saints in Jerusalem.

He doesn't say I'm writing to remind you that there are poor and starving in Jerusalem. This famine has continued for some years. I'm giving instructions, orders to the churches of Galatia and I'm giving instructions and orders to you.

This is Paul's idea, that the people in Corinth send a gift. On the first day of the week, let each of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. When I come, whomever you approve by your letters, I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.

Barnabas and I did it some years back. You can pick somebody to go. If it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.

Paul is already anticipating, wouldn't it be great if he accompanies this gift to Jerusalem like he did the first time. That is all it says in 1 Corinthians and people are free to choose. So, then turn over to 2 Corinthians chapter 8. Sometime later, Paul sends an additional letter and the tone has changed even more.

Brethren, this is chapter 8 of 2 Corinthians. We make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. These are poor people in Macedonia who have heard about the need in Jerusalem and spontaneously decided to send a gift, even in their poverty.

They don't have much, but they want to share what they have. I bear witness that according to their ability and beyond their ability, they were freely willing. Notice, 8.3 of 2 Corinthians, they were freely willing.

Like that first gift from Antioch, these people said, hey, let's get some stuff together and send it to Jerusalem. They implored us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. Who is imploring whom? The poor churches in Macedonia come to Paul and implore him, please, we're getting some stuff together, we want you to take it to Jerusalem for us.

We heard you did this once before, we want you to do it again. You did it from Antioch, do it from Macedonia. They implored us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

Not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord. Do you see that? They first gave themselves to the Lord. That is the condition that allows God to bless the poor saints in Jerusalem through them.

Before they gave anything to the poor, they gave themselves to the Lord. They are bond slaves of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Anxious to represent Him and to reflect His glory.

They first gave themselves to the Lord and then to us by the will of God. So we urged Titus that as he had begun, he would also complete this grace in you as well. This is going so well in Macedonia.

Paul sent Titus to Corinth and said, hey, you Corinthians are not near as bad off as these Macedonians. Why don't you get a gift together as well? So we sent you Titus, we urged Titus. Who is urging whom? In Macedonia, the believers who first gave themselves to the Lord are urging Paul to help them help the saints in Jerusalem.

In Corinth, Paul is urging Titus to go urge them to give. Do you see the difference? You could say, Titus, he's an associate of Paul, he's bringing Paul's message. Paul is an apostle, so this must be what God wants us to do.

It remains to be seen. We urged Titus, verse 6, 2 Corinthians 8. As he had begun, he would also complete this grace in you as well. As you abound in everything, in faith, speech, knowledge, and diligence, and your love for us, see that you abound in this grace also.

The Corinthians are abounding in speech, in faith, in knowledge, in diligence, and in love for Paul and his team. So since you are doing well in those areas, I'm giving you another area that I want you to abound in. I want you to make up a financial gift like the people in Macedonia have done.

Do you see the difference in where it is being initiated and where the urging is coming from? What direction the urging is going? What is the way to know if you are supposed to give or to serve? Do you wait for someone to tell you based on their status in a family or in an organization or in a spiritual capacity of some sort, and you follow their instructions? Who is our master to whom we stand or fall? Judge not, lest you be judged. The judgment with which you judge others, you will be judged with yourself. Who am I to judge another man's servant? To his own master he stands or falls.

People have assignments for service, and it may not be my assignment. If I see a need, if I see an opportunity, I can share that opportunity, but I can't go tell the Lord's other servants that they need to pitch in. They stand or fall to their master, and servants are not each other's masters.

Even the apostles can't dictate to the churches to part with their financial resources and send it off to Jerusalem. It has to come from within. That's why we have the Holy Spirit.

That's why we have the Word of God. And I may have to apologize to the Apostle Paul when I get to glory, but my reading of this passage in Corinthians, one of the reasons I've not, it's one of the few, I think only this and Philemon have I not yet done in the New Testament, is I wrestle with 2 Corinthians because I personally believe Paul was off the mark in urging them to give instead of being urged by those who had an inbuilt Holy Spirit-driven desire to give. I don't think Paul should have done it.

And when he gets this gift and takes it to Jerusalem, it ends badly, as you know. So, you abound in these other things. I think you should abound in giving a gift to Jerusalem, he says in verse 7. Verse 8, I speak not by commandment.

I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. If you love God as much as the Macedonians do, you'll give the way the Macedonians did. That is subjectivity.

That is not the will of God. That is not the Word of God. That is not the criteria of God, to measure yourself by other servants.

But Paul, here, gives them a subjective, don't fall behind. You've got to keep up with the Joneses in Macedonia. And I am testing the sincerity of your love to see if you will give money the way the Macedonians did.

That does not comport with Scripture. I'm sorry, but I cannot make this fit. I'm testing the sincerity of your love by whether you ante up the way these other believers have chosen of their own free will to do.

I am testing your sincerity. It doesn't say the Lord is testing the sincerity of your faith. Paul is testing them.

Paul wants them to be similar. And Paul estimates that they have more wherewithal. They are not as poverty-stricken as those in the region of Galatia or Macedonia.

I'm not giving you a commandment, Paul says. I'm testing the sincerity of your Christian love. If you really love, you're going to have a big gift waiting for me to collect and take to Jerusalem.

That's what he's saying. How is that right? I cannot make that work, personally. You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you, through His poverty, might become rich.

And in this, I give advice. This is not a commandment. Paul says, this is my personal advice.

This is, you know, he says in one place, not I but the Lord. And in another place he says, not the Lord but I. This is one of those not the Lord but I passages. And he says twice, I'm not giving you a command.

This is not from the Lord. This is me, Paul, talking. And I personally think Paul's off the mark.

I give you advice. It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago. They had begun taking up a collection.

And as the famine hit, and they realized that they needed to take care of their own, they stopped increasing the size of the collection for Jerusalem. They're looking to their own area, their own needs, their own families, their own neighbors, their own fellow church members. And Paul says, y'all were starting to build up a fund, and you stopped contributing to it.

You started a year ago. Verse 11, but now you must also complete the doing of it, that as there was a readiness to desire, so also there will be a completion of what you have. You started well.

But he doesn't say like he does to the Galatians, you were running well in the faith. Who tripped you? He says you were running well in accruing money to give to Jerusalem. Now you stopped.

So if there's a willing mind, verse 12, it's accepted according to what one has, not according to what he does not have. I do not mean others should be eased and you burdened, but by an equality that now at this time, your abundance may supply their lack. You've got money and they don't, so you should give it.

That their abundance may supply your lack, that there may be equality. Well, you can read the rest of this and into chapter 9. So look at chapter 9. Concerning the ministry to the saints, it is

superfluous for me to write to you. I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago, and your zeal has stirred up the majority.

Yet I've sent brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect. I've been telling the people in Macedonia what generous people you are, and I don't want that boasting to be undercut or undermined if you don't actually follow through. The Macedonians need to keep the good opinion of you that I gave them a year ago.

This is subjectivity. You need to dig deep in your pocket and complete this gift for Jerusalem, or what are the Macedonians going to think? I've already told them how great you are. And if you don't follow through, what will they think? Why doesn't Paul appeal to what the Lord thinks? Verse 7, chapter 9, 2 Corinthians, Let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or out of necessity.

God loves a cheerful giver. God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. That is true.

God loves those who give from the heart, but clearly the Corinthians are not currently giving from the heart, are they? That's why the collection has ceased and the amount has not increased since a year before. So Paul is telling them a true thing. God loves a cheerful giver and they should give not grudgingly or out of necessity, but he is putting a necessity on them himself in the very act of communicating this truth.

He is urging them to go beyond it. What are the Macedonians think? I don't want my boasting to have been in vain. I thought so well of you and now I'm starting to be disappointed.

So may he, in verse 10, who supplies seed to the sower, bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. The administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God while through the proof of this ministry they glorify God for the obedience of your confession. What is he saying here? When we take this gift to Jerusalem, they're going to thank God that the gospel has come to the Gentiles.

They're going to be thankful not on simply hearing that you've come to faith and have eternal life and honor and worship the Lord Jesus. They're going to be thankful and glorify God because they're getting money from you. And the money is going to vindicate and cause thanksgiving.

I tell you from my heart, I think Paul's off the mark here. This is not the reason to do what we do as he abundantly communicates elsewhere. But in these days, Paul gets obsessed with the opinion of the Jerusalem church.

And he reflects it here. If you all will get a nice gift together and I and others can take it back to Jerusalem, they are going to thank God for you. Verse 12 again, the administration of this

service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but abounds through many thanksgiving to God while through the proof of this ministry.

This ministry is proof that you're legitimate. It's proof that the gospel really is sent to the Gentiles. And I really am a legitimate apostle.

And what I'm doing in and among you is valid. I need to prove that to the people in Jerusalem. The proof of this ministry.

What happened when Paul actually tries this? Do you remember Acts chapter 21? Flip over there quickly as we close. They come to Jerusalem. He is told by the very same prophet Agabus, don't go.

He is told by the daughters of Philip, don't go to Jerusalem. Bondage and chains await you and you're not here to be bound and chained. So look at verse 10 of chapter 21.

We stayed many days in Caesarea. Certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea, the same one that accurately predicted the famine. Comes, took Paul's belt, bound his hands and feet and said, thus says the Holy Spirit, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

When we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go to Jerusalem. Why is he bound and determined to go to Jerusalem? He's got these gifts and he wants to prove the validity of his ministry by bringing money in a good cause to aid the poor in Jerusalem. That's why he's going.

Why does Agabus wrap Paul's own belt around his hands? Because it is Paul's own misapprehension and faulty motivation that is going to result in his bondage and imprisonment. It's Paul's own doing. Paul is doing this to himself.

It's his own belt that Agabus uses. You're on the wrong track. Fellow believers unanimously urge Paul, don't go.

This is not your mission. Why are you going to Jerusalem? You're the apostle to the Gentiles as you have emphasized over and over again. You don't need to convince Jerusalem of the validity of your ministry.

What for? People who come to Christ know the validity of the ministry because they've received eternal life and entered into a relationship with God. They benefit from the word of truth that is taught and presented and the pastors that you train and place in every city, appoint elders, Timothy, Titus, and these others. That's Paul's ministry.

That's his assignment. That's his focus. He doesn't need to go back to Jerusalem.

There are others who can take a gift. If people are motivated as they were in Macedonia, let them send representatives from their own town and see how it goes. Why does Paul need to

accompany the gift? He doesn't and he shouldn't.

But he has this idea, the proof of his ministry. He wants vindication and validation from the leadership of the Jerusalem Church. And the leadership of the Jerusalem Church is Jerusalem James.

If you go back to Galatians, which is an earlier letter, remember what Paul says happens when men from James come? Chapter 2, verse 11, When Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face because he was to be blamed. Before certain men came from James, Jerusalem James, Peter would eat with the Gentiles. When they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision, wanting their good opinion, which is what Paul later in life fails to remember and fails to learn from the example of Peter and he's going to repeat the mistake.

The rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, withdrawing from the Gentiles, wanting the good opinion of the Jerusalem Church and the leadership of the Jerusalem Church. This is not just men from Jerusalem, it's men from James. James sent these guys, men of the circumcision.

The rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. Even Barnabas gets deflected and distracted by this. When I saw they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, If you being a Jew live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? What is the answer to that question? Because I want the good opinion of the circumcision party.

I want the good opinion of the Jerusalem Church and they will think well of us and believe that we're legitimate if we follow the rules they think are important, rules that God has set aside to impress those who are thought to be pillars but are not. In his younger days, in his better days, in his more clear perception, Paul called this out and said that's a mistake. You cannot go back to the law.

If I rebuild that which I tore down, how am I not an offender? He says here. You can read this section. Oh foolish Galatians chapter 3 who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth? Paul himself is going to fall victim.

It is a pernicious tool that Satan uses to deflect us, to get us concerned about other people's opinions and these are people in the church. These are believers in the Lord Jesus but they've got views of what Christianity ought to be. What do you mean you don't go to a church that has a building? What do you mean you don't sit in a pew? You don't have a choir in a parking lot in a baptistry or whatever else? Where's your steeple? Where's your formality? Where are the accouterments that we associate with church? There's something wrong with you and if we are influenced, if we change the way we live, if we say, well when so and so's around I'm going to act differently because I want their good opinion.

It tripped up Peter. It tripped up Paul. Who are we to think that it can't trip us up? We serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

We follow the exhortations, the instructions, the doctrines, principles and promises that come from our Heavenly Father and it is that where we receive our approval. It is that that gives us our legitimacy and our standing. Let God be true and every man a liar.

We have to find our place, our legitimacy, our effectiveness, our service and function with the approval of God in Heaven. If there are those who understand God's will and they approve, that's wonderful. But we cannot live our lives to please people.

You cannot endeavor to make someone happy. Happiness has to come from within. Motivation to do the Lord's will comes from within.

We hear the need, we have the word of God and we respond accordingly. Not every opportunity is our opportunity. Some needs are best met by others.

We have to prayerfully seek the will of our Father in Heaven and ensure that we are in the very center of it and we're not living to please people. If it trips up the Apostle Paul, we've got to be just doubly careful. This example is written for our instruction and our warning.

Even the best of us can fall victim to subjectivity and we've got to avoid it and hew to the narrow road and the straight gate. Well, thankfully, Jerusalem James did not write our letter. I believe James, the son of Zebedee wrote it and we're going to proceed with what he has to say when we convene again next Sunday.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the examples, both positive and negative, that rebuke, correct, and instruct us, that provide for us the necessary doctrinal understanding, a perception of the truth, that your Holy Spirit can use to shine a light on our path, to motivate us and encourage us that whether human opinions are good or bad, we are living in the light of your countenance. We are following the example of the Lord Jesus, who went to the cross despising the shame of human opinion and is now seated at your right hand.

We pray that we can follow in his worthy footsteps in that regard and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.