

## **James 25-04-27a**

Greetings, welcome to the Sunday services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 27th of April 2025. We're picking up after a break with our study in the book of James in Hebrew and Aramaic.

Of course, his name is Jacob. The brothers were Yohanan and Yaakov in the original language, the sons of Zebedee, disciples of the Lord Jesus. I believe he is the author of this letter for multiple reasons.

We're going to pick up in verses two through five today, and it is so practical. It is very applicable for each and every one of us, this wonderful information. It is pertinent, it is helpful, and we'll dive right in.

Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study. Father, we are so grateful for the many ways that You watch over us, You provide for us, You protect us, You test us and challenge us. You give us opportunities to exercise our faith, to remember what we've learned, to be blessed and be a blessing in the fellowship of other believers, to live as a community endeavoring to reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus.

We thank You for Him. We thank You that He represents us at Your right hand, that He intercedes on our behalf, that You and He together have given to us the Holy Spirit to sustain us, to bring to our minds the word of truth that we have learned, to help us to see its pertinence and application. We pray that this portion of Your Word that we look at today will be meaningful and helpful to each and every one, that we will remember it, we will see how it pertains in the circumstances we face, the opportunities that You're giving us each day to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We pray these things in His name. Amen. The passage before us, having been introduced by the individual who wrote it, who of God and the Lord Jesus Christ is a slave, that is His authority, that is His reason for being listened to by those who have been scattered abroad.

This happened in many cases before their time and wasn't their fault. They find themselves in circumstances that are challenging and difficult, not of their own making. They didn't choose it.

They didn't make a bad choice of an option and wind up in distress and they can blame themselves. They are where they are in the larger fabric of God's plan. We find ourselves similarly often facing the circumstances that are not of our own making, situations that we didn't stick our hand in the air to face.

But here we are. God is in His heaven. It has been woven into His plan and purpose for our benefit and His glory.

This letter is written to people in that situation. It was the 12 tribes then. It is us today and now.

We are confederated by different kinds of bonds, just as these people were both Israelites and Christians. We are Christians. We are Americans.

We are, in some cases, those who share a local community. In other cases, we share a past or relationships. But there are multiple things that tie us together.

Just as the original recipients, we are similar. And James is going to, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, call on us, not only individually, but as a community to respond to this situation using the resources he is communicating in this letter, again, via the inspiration and power of the Holy Spirit. So when we pick up in verse 2 and he says, my brethren, this is not a message coming from an outsider who doesn't understand the aforementioned circumstances and situations and factors.

He is one of us. He knows from experience and has similar concerns, a similar history, similar circumstances that he faces. James, when he says, my brethren, this is an expression of inclusion, of sympathy and empathy, shared experience, shared bonds that he expressed in the preceding verse.

And we always like to hear from someone that we know, that we have things in common with. We recently took a trip and there were people sitting across from us that initially we didn't know and certainly did not realize that eventually we would find things in common. But through a glancing conversation and beginning to talk, suddenly discovered that there were many things in common, not the least of which is the gentleman is a lawyer who works at a courthouse and the courthouse is in Paris, Arkansas.

My great granddad helped build that courthouse. He was on the construction crew. And amongst the belongings that I have inherited was a picture from around 1930 that my great granddad had kept because he helped to build it.

And it's a picture that apparently nobody has really seen since. And so as a result of this conversation on a train, I have had a subsequent conversation with this couple and sent them a scan of that picture and realized that we share faith in the Lord Jesus. And while there are differences, there are often commonalities.

And you never know when a conversation that seems to be chance or superficial or momentary is going to lead to something that the Lord can use as an entree for sharing our faith, sharing our understanding of the truth, developing a relationship that initially we didn't see coming. James may not be known to most of the people to whom he is writing, but this common ground gains him an acceptance for the message as the messenger that he wouldn't otherwise have. The shared experiences, this is a point of application, the shared or common situations and experiences that we have are often used by God to give us an entree for conversation and perhaps fellowship, witness, example, something that even if we never know it, it causes someone to ponder and think about spiritual things.

And God can use it with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to draw others to himself. And we won't know until we get to glory, the faithfulness that we exhibit, being used by God to influence the lives of others. I have mentioned this not recently, but if you've been in the church long enough, you've heard me refer to this example before.

We attended a Bible church in Tulsa when I was a teenager. And we got a new youth minister who was there briefly and he got married and he ended up leaving and going to do other things. He doesn't know me.

He has no idea that when he sat on the platform and when he would share his witness and his testimony and his understanding of the of God, the guy was infused with such enthusiasm and such joy. I had been a Christian since I was old enough to make decisions. I'd been in Sunday school my whole life.

But as a junior high, early high school age individual, here was somebody whose faith just vitalized them. It was visible. He had a joy and a light that was just uncontainable and leaked out.

Whenever he talked about the Lord, talked about the scriptures, talked about the blessings that he had received and the opportunities that God had given him, I thought, I would like to have some of that. Wouldn't it be great to wake up in the morning excited about your Christian faith and ready for God to do whatever God is going to do and to be a part of it? And his name was Bud Peterson. Never forget him.

Young guy in his 20s, recently married, but he made a profound impact on me that he is utterly and completely unaware of. Don't know whatever happened to him, but I began to spend a bit more time and emphasis on my own spiritual life because I thought, you know, I don't really experience that. There's something wrong with my approach.

There's something better available in Christian life and faith than I think I've just been kind of idling along. I've been taking things for granted. If that's the kind of life that's available, Lord, lead me into that.

And when you pray that prayer, I promise you God will answer it. And I got a wind in my sails at that point from that day to this, that it's exciting to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's a wonderful privilege to have another day to think about the truth of God's word, what is upcoming, what he's already doing, what he has done in the past, and to be grateful and to go to God in prayer, anxious to tell him what a wonderful plan and purpose he has and how much I appreciate and worship him and appreciate the Lord Jesus Christ and worship him for what has been given to me who am utterly hopeless, helpless, useless, and undeserving.

But God in his grace has chosen to weave us together so that we are brethren. And there is an opportunity for joy no matter what the circumstance is. Right after love, which is the measure of whether or not we are doing well in our Christian faith, you have the fruit of the spirit, which

is love and then joy.

And somewhere, even in our difficulties, even in our challenges, even at times when we weep with those who weep, or we are serious about various aspects of what faces us, somewhere in there should be that abiding joy. And it was the example, it was the unspoken witness of someone else that impressed that on my heart. There is, that's what I call spiritual joy.

Where can I get that? Why am I missing that? Let me go and with the Lord's guidance and grace, partake of that. And you start praying, show me the love, show me the joy, show me the peace. Stand by, be sure you've got a big bucket because there's going to be a heavy rain when God answers that prayer.

So it's no idle thing when James here says, my brothers, we may have different experiences, but we have a lot in common in terms of our standing before the Father via the Lord Jesus Christ with the presence and power of the Spirit. And I am telling you not only as a principle, but on the basis of my own experience, reckon it to be an occasion for joy. That was the translation we saw last time here, when it says count, account, that hegemon idea, you take charge of this, you rule over this, don't be ruled by circumstances.

You take a view of the circumstances based on your standing in Christ and you decide that when you face these challenges, this is an occasion for joy. It is a judicial decision. It is a ruling decision that we make.

I don't want circumstances dictating whether or not I have joy. I don't want other people in their opinion dictating whether or not I have peace. I don't want the various peccadillos and failings or expressions of attitude of others to determine whether or not I operate in love.

God has given us power in the Holy Spirit and power in his word. We rule over these. We are the hegemon.

We have hegemony. That's what this word is in Greek. You take charge of this and you establish a policy that this is an occasion for joy.

Count it all joy. When you fall into whatever kind of challenges, poikilos, we saw this last time, it's just who knows what it might be, any kind of a challenge, count it all joy. When you fall, you didn't walk into it.

You didn't choose it. It wasn't an option that you invested yourself in. Something tripped you.

I got tripped the other day and hit someone dear to me with two pieces of firewood. I didn't intend to fall, but I fell and it created challenges for me and the victim and ongoing challenges. You hit somebody with a couple of pieces of firewood.

They're going to suffer for a while. And whose fault is it? It is an accident, but I fell. She fell.

Injury resulted. Now we're dealing with trials of various kinds. I have guilt, shame, retrospective

regret.

What could I have done different? The victim suffers physical pain, bruising, and so on. It was a fall. You can always say, well, if I had picked everything up and was on level ground and was more careful and stood on the other side of the wood trailer, there's no point going back and forensically solving that when you just fall.

You catch your toe, you fall, nothing you can do about it. There are results that we deal with afterwards. So this can be an occasion for rejoicing if I choose to view it as such.

Instead of moaning about the pain and the guilt and the hardship, what about the occasion where God can fill in, where human failings create an issue, where whether it's my mistake or someone else's, whether it is happenstance or caused malice of forethought, it doesn't really matter. This is an occasion for God's grace. Take a look at what the scriptures have to say.

Sometimes this is an active opposition on the part of other people. Turn back to the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter five, verse 10. Here is one of the poikilos, one of the many varieties of trial or suffering.

This is when somebody else gets upset. There are innumerable examples of this, both true and fictional. I saw a recent story being told on the flat screen where here is Jason Statham and he's a retired agent with all kinds of, a particular set of skills like Liam Neeson, but he's retired.

He's gotten out and he's just trying to raise his daughter and take care of her. And they go to a town where nothing is known about him. He's just trying to keep his head low, but somebody takes a dislike because his little daughter is being picked on by a bully while she's got a particular set of skills and she defends herself.

The family of the bully decides that their child has been wronged with no justification whatsoever. And they get a burr under their saddle and begin to throw stones and set fires and persecute the innocent for doing nothing more than sticking up for themselves and defending what is theirs. And this just escalates and others get involved.

Then a criminal element related to this bully's family gets involved. And the whole story subsequently is about something that began as certainly not the victim's fault, but someone has a different view and decides that they are in the wrong and they need to be punished. They need to be taught a lesson.

You're not from around here. You're a stranger and you're interrupting our community. So we feel justified in doing wrongs against you.

That's what Jesus is talking about here. This kind of thing in Matthew chapter five, beginning at verse 10. Blessed are you, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.

You're doing something right. You are espousing a view or values. You're supporting a kind of

government.

You are speaking up for social remedies and proprieties where people have privacy based on if they're a boy or a girl, a man or a woman. People have opportunities that aren't elbowed aside and trampled on by people who have an agenda and who think they are entitled when they're not. If you defend these views, if you speak these views, people can decide, I'm going to key your car.

I'm going to spray paint your house. I'm going to deface your property. You deserve punishment because you hold a view that I disagree with who's right and who's wrong.

That is persecution. There is no more heinous persecution than being attacked because we are believers. And in many cases, this is secondary effect.

Why do we support candidates and government policies that we do? It's because we are Christians, because it is an expression of Christian values. And to be opposed, to be attacked, to be vilified, to be canceled, to be disparaged, to be physically attacked, to have our property defaced because we express our Christianity is a kind of persecution for our faith. Jesus says, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.

Notice here, he doesn't say for my sake, it is the righteousness that is expressed as a result of our Christian faith. Why are they blessed? Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Let me ask you this.

On the day that the Lord Jesus sat on the slopes of the Mount and delivered this message, where is the kingdom of heaven? Whatever else you want to believe about it, it is not present. Yes, Jesus is not on a throne. He's not ruling with a rod of iron.

He's not dispensing justice. The Gentiles are not coming and bringing the glory of the nations into his domain. It is a kingdom that is yet future, right? It is a future kingdom.

So these that are persecuted for righteousness sake are to consider themselves blessed, which is an occasion for rejoicing. Why? Their affliction of the moment is a sign and a symptom of future blessing, future possession in the heavenly kingdom that is not yet happening. I will endure.

I will persevere. I will even celebrate and rejoice and count myself blessed in the difficulties of the present because I know the promise of the Lord Jesus and the witness of scripture that there is future blessing that is certain. That future blessing is an expression of faith.

I believe the promise of God. I believe the testimony of the Lord Jesus that if I suffer persecution, if I suffer hardship now, there is recompense. There is compensation.

There is double blessing, double possession, double opportunity in the kingdom, which is yet future. Who hopes for what he sees? We hope for what we do not see. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

You see at the beginning of Hebrews chapter 11. So this is the working expression of our faith. We're Christians.

We have a Bible. We come to church. We look at the truth of God's word.

We pray. We endeavor to live a Christian life. This is the substance.

This is the rubber rolling over the road, hitting the bumps, absorbing the sharp gravel and getting it done as Christians is believing the promise of God that when we are challenged and things are difficult, unlike worldly people who start going hammer and tongs to fix a problem and address the symptoms and get somebody to pay and find someone to blame and be angry, be upset, be worried, be flustered, be disappointed, be depressed. That's not us. My brethren, those who come from the 12 tribes as the initial audience is, but we are believers.

That's not our life. When challenges come our way, we sink our teeth into it. We grab it with both hands because this is working for us, blessing, opportunity, reward in the future.

So blessed are those who are persecuted for living a life of righteousness, for embracing, espousing and expressing a righteous point of view. Don't be cowed. Don't be silenced.

Don't be banished out of the conversation. If you are standing up for righteousness, righteousness is the expression of divine principles. It is the outworking and the application of those principles and those doctrines and those divine truths.

If we don't reflect them, if we don't express them, if we don't live them, who is going to? It's us. We have been scattered. We have been placed in communities and in families and in relationships with other people in whatever venue.

We are here to shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. That's why we're here. So let your light so shine before men.

Don't be cowed. Don't be made bashful. Don't be reticent.

We don't have to be aggressive. We don't have to be unkind. We don't have to be abrasive or contentious or argumentative, but we don't have to be pushed out of the conversation either.

We can say what we have to say. And if we express the truth in love, if we are ready to give an answer to those who wonder why we hold this view and not their view, we can do it in a peaceful, in a persuasive, non-threatening, non-attacking way. We can be strong without being toxic.

You can be firm without being obnoxious. And we can say, you certainly have the right to your opinion, but here's what I believe and here's why I believe it. This is righteousness based in the Word of God.

And if you understand things differently, go be warmed, be fed. Good luck with that. But here's

the expression of my Christian faith.

This is the application of divine truth. This is righteousness. Blessed are you if people talk and think and act negatively toward you because you stand for righteousness.

You represent righteousness as the body of the Lord Jesus Christ on this earth. Count yourself blessed. Why? There is recompense.

You are laying up for yourself treasure in heaven. God is going to be pleased. Well done, thou good and faithful servant.

Who doesn't want to hear those words that is anything like serious about their Christian faith and their spiritual walk? Is there anything you would desire more than to hear the Lord Jesus say, well done? Well done. You did it right. What's better than that? I can't think of anything.

That's what's on the table. That's what is on the line in how we choose to judge our circumstances, how we view our daily life. Am I being crushed? Am I being pushed? Am I being oppressed? Am I being pigeonholed? Am I being limited or am I the hegemon? And I'm going to look at this as God giving me an opportunity to prevail and to be more than conquerors through him that loved us.

We'll see the scriptures that support this view book after book after book of New Testament revelation reinforces this perspective. This is what James leads with to these scattered and persecuted believers in the Roman empire. He says, don't think of yourself as persecuted and scattered.

You think of yourself as being handed an opportunity to prevail, to be a place where God's grace and God's power are expressed to be an example, to be a witness, to be a reflecting surface for God's glory. That is an occasion to rejoice. It's all in how you look at it.

Are you glass nearly empty or look at what's in my glass? That's what's on the line. That's the challenge in this verse. Let's pause here and take our break.

We're going to enjoy some wonderful special music. When we return, we're going to see the witness of scripture that so emphasizes this. It is underrepresented.

It is under appreciated. It is under communicated in the modern Christian world. The daily walk that should define us and is going to define the eternal future for us.

We'll see that when we come back.