

James 25-04-27b

We're looking at James chapter one, verse two and following. And we're seeing that the essential piece of our Christian life and faith is what he leads with in this letter. What do we do with our day? How do we view our circumstances, whatever they may be? There is no believer that has an unclouded day, day after day, it's already the millennial kingdom.

All it is is blessing. There's no challenge. There's no cloud in front of the sun.

There's no hardship. There's no difficulty. There's no suffering.

There's no persecution. There's no rough ground to traverse of any kind. There's no valley of the shadow.

There's no bereavement. There's no disappointment. There's no discouragement, no depression, no setback, nobody has that life.

And I mean, nobody, all of us are challenged. And what distinguishes us from unbelievers? What's the point and the purpose of being a Christian at this time, in this place, with these circumstances, with our history, with our potentials, what is the point? The point is to view these circumstances as James describes. Take charge of it and say, this is an occasion for rejoicing because I know some things and I am going to apply.

I'm going to implement what I know. What I know is not a present reality and a visible piece of knowledge for the world. In many cases, it is contained in the words of scripture.

It is promise. It is hope for the future. It is anticipation of the kingdoms which are to come.

And those are more real to me than the impact of these circumstances. Circumstance is hard. I can kick myself.

I can want to kick others. I can rail against the machine. I can complain against the powers that be and the situations, large and small, that plague me.

And any unbeliever can do that. We are called to a different life, a supernatural life, not a natural life. We should be different.

We are here to be different. We are here to channel and to infuse into daily life spiritual truth, spiritual power. There's no other reason to be here.

Anybody can do a job. Anybody can live. Anybody can have relatives.

Anybody can navigate the day. The world is full of unbelievers who do that stuff and are governed by emotions and by prejudices and by confirmation bias and all other kinds of things. The inner voice that says I'm right and I know I am.

All the rest of y'all are wrong and I'm going to attack and disparage and argue against you because I know I'm right. And it's relative, it's subjective, it's human viewpoint. Who can express the divine viewpoint? Who can live the supernatural life enabled and empowered by the spirit, guided by the truth of God's word, headed for the narrow road and the straight gate that leads to life, future life, fulfilled hope.

Blessed are you, Jesus says in Matthew 5, when you are persecuted because you represent righteousness on the earth. Only believers can do that. Nobody else can represent righteousness.

It counts. God watches, God sees, God records. It is written in the books.

God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith, your labor of love, and your patience of hope. The triad of Christian virtue, God tracks each of those things for each one of us. If I get distracted, if I end up being too invested in the world and too caught up in the story and the story problem and forget who I am and why I'm here, Satan wins.

There's an amusing song that shows up on one of my Pandora channels. It's sung by a group called The Devil Makes Three. And they seem to have this thing about the devil for some reason.

But this song is called Sometimes The Devil Wins. Sometimes The Devil Wins. The devil should not win in our lives.

He is defeated. Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. But every time we get caught up in circumstances, we are defined and dominated by what happens.

We become subjective, eyes on self, eyes on circumstances, eyes on people. The devil wins. Sometimes the devil wins and he shouldn't.

That's our fault. That's my bad. If the devil wins.

I have access to that which makes us more than conquerors. We'll see that verse coming up. But we see this in Matthew 5, 10 through 12.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, Jesus says in verse 12 of Matthew 5. Great is your reward in heaven. Is that more real to you than current present setback, adversity, difficulty, suffering in some cases? Is the suffering of this present time so impressive and so mountainous that we can't see past it or see beyond it? It's too big. It's too much.

It's too present. I just can't think about anything but this present adversity. Shame on us.

The Holy Spirit and the word of God are infinitely more powerful than these momentary light afflictions. We have to believe it and we have to live and act and think accordingly. I'm not gonna let these things buffalo me and fool me.

It's like a magic act. You watch these magicians. It's so fun to watch magicians and see if you can figure out how they perform these illusions where they seem to pull things out of thin air.

They seem to make big things disappear. They seem to saw women in half and the rest of it. And it is an illusion.

No woman has been sawed in half on a magician stage for real ever, but almost everybody has seen the illusion. If you believe the illusion, you're kind of a rube. Have you been fooled to the point that you think he's got supernatural power to disconnect and reconnect the halves of a woman's body? Shame on you for believing that, but that's us if we let situations that we face buffalo us into thinking and acting like people in the world that have no access to the Spirit and the word.

Shame on us. So be the hegemon, be the king, be the ruler, take charge of this and say, you know what? Other people might think this is a bad deal. This is an occasion for rejoicing because God is giving me the opportunity to exercise, demonstrate, manifest, and bear witness to the reality of his truth.

Show my faith, demonstrate my faith, work my faith. Have it be in evidence and recorded in the books and along with my faith comes my hope and my love. The interesting thing is, and we don't think about this, we're so myopic.

All we see is what's right in front of us. We're nearsighted. Think about this though.

How many times have we talked about the triad of Christian virtues? You know what they are, but they are interconnected. You cannot separate them. The means, the motive, and the measure, the fruit, the result, the outworking, they are inextricably linked.

They are inseparable. So what do you think happens when we exercise our faith? Sometimes we're struggling with hope. It's difficult to think of the reality of the eternal future and the invisible fulfillment of promises that are yet unseen.

And it seems too distant. I'm so caught up in the immediate. It's hard to sustain hope.

Sometimes it is difficult to be loving and to remember the spheres of love and the appropriate level of the expression of love depending on where people fall in that sphere. What is required of me? What is expected of me? What should define my expression of love? It gets really difficult. But in any one of these areas, if you strengthen faith without any effort on our part, our love is strengthened and our hope is made more certain and sure and more real.

Strengthening any one of them strengthens all of them. So why can I count it joy when I'm faced with adversities? By having a clear-cut, very visible opportunity to work my faith and operate in faith, express my faith, live by faith, walk by faith, pray by faith, converse by faith. Without me even trying, I am going to find my operations in the sphere of love and my expectations in the sphere of hope stronger.

This is why the testing of your faith produces patience. Let patience have its perfect work so that you will be fruitful because working our faith strengthens us in areas that don't even seem to be connected. But we find that we are equipped for every good work by exercising faith.

So when an opportunity to work that faith, to exercise it, to strengthen it, when that comes up, this is great. My entire sphere of operation as a believer is going to get stronger and better and more effective. It's going to reflect the glory of God more and it is going to justify and vindicate God giving me life and breath and leaving me on this planet.

All of that is going to be more meaningful because here is a difficulty in which I can work my faith. Unbeliever can't do it. Ignorant believer, apathetic believer, distracted believer can't do it.

Weak believers, no hope. They need milk and not solid food. I'm chomping on some solid food here and I am going to get it done.

Can't ask a baby to mow the lawn, right? I can mow the lawn and I can do a great job. I'll do the mowing, I'll do the trimming, I'll do the raking, I'll clean it up. Things are gonna look like a golf course when I'm done because I'm mature.

Kid can't do that, baby can't do that. These things are for the mature. We are long enough and strong enough in the faith that God can use us to do big things in His plan and purpose and prepare us for even bigger and better things in the ages which are to come.

It's a great occasion. How tragic to get deflected and distracted, get subjective, beat ourselves up, beat up others, be angry, be bitter, be impatient, worry, gossip, malign, judge, get into interactions with other people, the politics that surround relationships near and far and be completely enmeshed in what unbelievers are always swamped in. We've been delivered, we've been set free.

That's what James is talking about here. Be the hegemon. You consider it, account it, state as a fact and make it the policy.

This is an occasion for me to rejoice. Look at the positive potential of this difficult, hard, and sometimes painful situation. This has got positive potential.

I'm gonna concentrate on that because only I can do it. I'm a believer. I've got divine resources to convert this hardship into glory.

That's what I'm going to do. I'm the hegemon. God has given me the grace and the power and the truth to do it.

Nobody but believers can do it. I'm a believer. I'm going to do it.

Count it all joy. When you fall into various kinds of trials, knowing my knowledge, this is what got Abraham through Mount Moriah. Knowing the promise of God is more real than whatever the circumstances seem to dictate.

Promise of God, in Isaac your seed will be called. Isaac can't die till he has a bunch of kids, at least one. Offspring, Isaac is gonna largely proliferate through Jacob and through Jacob's sons and descendants.

But Abraham considers the promise of God more real than the possibility of Isaac's death on Mount Moriah. It's not gonna happen. He's gonna walk down the mountain.

He's gonna get married and have at least one son, if not more, and he ends up having two. It's more real to you. It's one of the most stellar examples of faith in the Bible.

To have a knife in your hand, and Abraham has killed plenty of things in his 100 plus years of life. How many things has he killed with a knife? And none of them ever came back. So it is the reality of his experience versus the substance of God's promise.

That's the kind of decision that faces us, and ours are not nearly that taxing. Don't have life and death on the line in most cases. Can we not trust God? If Abraham can do it, Abraham wasn't a church-age believer.

What was the ministry of the Holy Spirit to him? How much scripture did he have? His scripture consisted in what God told him verbally. There was no books of Moses. There was no Old Testament prophets, no writings, no New Testament gospels, no New Testament epistles.

Didn't have the revelation. He didn't have a scrap of written revelation, but he believed the promise of God so firmly that he could take Isaac up there, put him on the altar and raise the knife. That is powerful.

I can't get over it. I think, what are my small faith challenges? There's a guy that had less than what I've got and did more with it than I think I could ever do. Would I have that kind of faith? Well, I wanna have some kind of faith.

I wanna follow what James says here. Knowing the testing of your faith produces endurance. You get tough, you get strong.

You can get up and go and keep on going. When the going gets tough, those that have got their faith-producing patience are gonna keep on going, enduring. This patience, we've got to let this patience develop.

Notice, let patience have its complete work. You know what happens when you mix ingredients, you're making something, you stick it in the oven and you gotta wait for nothing to stick to the toothpick before you pull it out of the oven. It's gotta bake for a certain amount of time.

Things you put in a grill or on a barbecue or whatever, they've gotta cook for a certain amount of time. What happens if you pull them out early? It's not ready, it's not done, it's not complete. All of that previous work is for naught if you pull it out and the fish still looks like gelatin, it's not cooked all the way through.

The cake has got liquid in the middle, it's not flaky and cake-like. Anything else you try to cook, the meat is raw and bleeding in the middle. A few people like it that way, but most don't.

You've got to let it cook. You've done the work, you put it in, and it has got to simmer, it has got to bake, it has got to be left alone. Guys that grill for any length of time know you don't keep lifting the lid to see if it's done, you lose your heat.

You can't estimate how much time. Stick it in there, close the lid, use your experience to know when it's done. Judge how much smoke's coming out the cooker.

It's a great clue. How much is it smoking? How much sizzling do I hear inside? I don't wanna lose my heat, I've got to be patient and let that fire do its completing work to make the food ready. Let patience have its perfect work.

Perfect doesn't mean without imperfection, it means it has been completed. You can complete something, it may not be perfect. If you've ever done sewing, I've sewed some things, they're never perfect in the sense that every stitch is in place, but it's complete.

You can put it on and wear it and it doesn't fall apart. I can repair a thing, I've stitched any number of things back together that I've torn or damaged or burnt or whatever, and the patch, the repair is complete. The thing is not perfect in the sense of moral perfection, it's perfect means you're done, it's ready, it's usable, it's workable, ready to go.

Have its completing work. You've got to be patient with patience. You've got to be patient over time and be patient that I'm gonna need patience tomorrow just like I needed today.

Let patience do its work, because enduring with patience is what completes us. Let patience have its completing work that you may be complete. What is it that we lack? All of us lack that foresight that says, I am going to endure unto the coming of the Lord.

I'm gonna be as patient as long as God gives me life and breath, I'm going to endure. I'm not gonna falter, flag, fail, fall, get depressed, get discouraged, get distracted, get deflected, give up, quit, throw up my hands, throw a fit. No, I am going to be patient and I'm gonna let this patience complete me.

My complete patience is gonna make me a complete person, which means you know where we are most incomplete is our endurance. At some point we give up, we quit. Remember King Saul facing the Philistines army deserting overnight, he had fewer and fewer troops.

He says, if I don't get busy and engage this battle, I'm not gonna have an army left. Samuel said to wait for him so that he can offer a sacrifice and dedicate the battle to the Lord. I don't have time to wait and dedicate the battle to the Lord.

I'll do it myself, I'm not gonna follow instructions. I'm gonna take charge of this situation and he loses the kingdom over it. He loses the kingdom.

What are we anticipating? Blessed are you when you're persecuted, when you're tested, when you are tried for righteousness sake, because you're a possessor of the kingdom. Saul thought, well, I'm gonna lose the kingdom if I don't get busy and do things my own way. And he ended up losing the kingdom in his efforts to try to preserve the kingdom his way instead of God's way.

Let patience have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. Isn't it interesting that all we have to do to be perfect and complete, lacking nothing is follow this exhortation to count it all joy when we're tested, when things are tough. We will be perfect and complete and lack nothing.

Why? Because the exercise of our faith is the rising tide that lifts the boats of our hope and our love. This is our calling. This is what it is to be a Christian and to represent the Lord Jesus as his body is to view our life for its positive potential and its future fulfillment of hope.

That makes us perfect and complete and we lack nothing. Wow, I didn't know it was that simple. The testing of our faith.

Our faith requires something to point our faith at. This is why we are a Bible church and we study the word of God and we endeavor to stay in it and look at it. This is the grist.

This is what goes into the mill of faith and gets ground into that which is offered to God as fine flour anointed with oil, the grain offering. This is us. This is our calling.

This is how to get it done. I so love getting the how-to. Don't give me a bunch of highfalutin theology.

Just tell me how God expects me to navigate this day. Well, it doesn't get any simpler, more straightforward or more clear than this. Be patient and that patience is going to do the work.

It is going to raise our hope and our love. It is going to strengthen our faith. Faith produces patience.

Patience enables us to keep on operating in faith. It's a cycle. It's like a piston engine.

It's gonna repeat and it's gonna produce horsepower in our lives, if you will. If any of you lack wisdom, notice what he goes on to here in verse five. If you lack wisdom, that's a problem for your faith because faith is the implementation of divine wisdom.

We saw this in our Proverbs study. Get wisdom and with all you're getting, get understanding because this is what faith uses. This is the material that faith engineers into the fulfillment of future hope, the patience that has its perfect work, that completes and matures us.

Faith is one thing, but what is it you're believing? You gotta believe the wisdom that comes from God. We see this throughout the scriptures. I gave you Matthew 5, 10 through 12, the Lord Jesus.

He emphasizes this again in Luke chapter six, verse 22 and 23. This is the record of another occasion where Jesus delivered a similar sermon. Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you, they revile you, they cast out your name as evil for the son of man's sake because I am endeavoring, I am focusing on living a Christian life that reflects the righteousness of God, that expresses it, that talks about it, that isn't afraid to opine and to say this policy good, this policy bad, this development good, this development bad.

We are here to shine the light of righteousness, which is God's glory. He is robed in righteousness. That is his glory, his truth.

So if we are reviled for that, that is for righteousness sake, for the son of man's sake. He is made unto us righteousness and peace and sanctification, cleansedness. That's Luke 6, 22.

Verse 23 goes on to say, rejoice in that day and leap for joy. These are Kara words like James uses here in verse two. Rejoice in that day, in that time, in that hour where people are pushing against you, disparaging you, being negative, talking ill, rejecting you, trying to penalize you because you stand for what is right.

You represent it just in what you're doing. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy. For indeed, truly, your reward is great in heaven.

In the future kingdoms, which are to come, you have a great reward. For in like manner, their fathers did to the prophets. I'll give you a quick aside here.

There are those in the current day who take this statement in Luke 6, 23 and it's parallel in Matthew. And so they persecuted the prophets before you and they take this as an exhortation to be prophetic. Jesus says they persecuted the prophets because they were representing God in their generation.

So you should be prophetic and don't take it badly if people push back against your prophesying. This is eisegesis. Jesus doesn't say blessed are you when you are prophetic, but there are swaths of people, tens of thousands of believers who are being convinced by teachers that we are encouraged, exhorted, and it is necessary for us to be prophetic, to get out into the public square and condemn political leaders and call out unrighteousness and be like an Old Testament prophet to decry social injustice.

And they base it, this is the only verse they can find in the entire New Testament that we are to go out and confront the culture and confront society and go out and be vocal opponents of bad policies. It is one thing to express our opinion and our understanding from scripture, but to assume that we are all called to be prophets and to go out like Amos and Isaiah and Hosea and confront people, stand on the street corner and decry what's going on is a gross misunderstanding and misreading of these verses. Why does Jesus mention the prophets at all here? Blessed are you when you are persecuted persecuted for the sake.

I guess I could combine those two words. Persecuted, you're persecuted for the sake. If you are

persecuted for Jesus' name, for representing and expressing righteousness, so they did to the prophets before you.

The prophets were visible expressions and expressors of God's righteousness. And they were sent to the people of God specifically to call out the fallenness and the disobedience and the apathy and the indifference of the covenant people of God. If you want to be prophetic in this age, you don't confront civil society and rail against the government.

Stand up in a church and say, we've got problems in this assembly of believers. To understand this as being prophetic, the prophets weren't sent to the nations. They gave prophecies that talked about the nations.

The only prophet that was ever sent to a foreign nation is Jonah. And that was a message to Israel. It wasn't even for their sake.

They repented, God doesn't say, and Nineveh and from then on, all of the people in the surrounding nations were blessed. Daniel prophesied to the people of Israel, as did Ezekiel in captivity. And all of that was in direct contact with the people of God.

But Daniel did not call out Babylonian slavery or Babylonian torture and persecution or Nebuchadnezzar's excesses. Everything is related to the spiritual identity of God's people. That's what prophets do.

Prophets confront the people of God in various ways and forms. Good point though. So, the notion that you can press these into service to defend going out and disparaging politics and belittling candidates and people to get elected and so on is very wide of the mark.

But the prophets are mentioned by Jesus because they were visible expressors of righteousness. Many times the people of Israel themselves didn't really embody righteousness. They were supposed to shine as a light to the Gentiles, but they so often failed in that, that it took the prophets to embody and represent God's righteousness.

And they were persecuted by God's own people. Jeremiah being thrown in the cistern and so on, the middle and latter part of Hebrews 11, where they were sought into, they were hounded and lived in caves and so on. God's own people did that to them.

Wasn't the Moabites and the Ammonites hounding the prophets of God. It was God's own people. So, they were expressors.

And if we are persecuted for righteousness sake by anyone, including fellow believers, rejoice. This is what happens when people embody and express God's righteousness. There are those who will oppose it for that reason alone.

You're not doing anything wrong. That's what Jesus meant by that. Acts chapter five, verse 41, when the early disciples preached Christ in Jerusalem and they were arrested and beaten for it.

Acts 5 41, they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. It's a fulfillment. And by the way, James, who I think wrote this letter, was alive at the time.

I can't help but think that if he is indeed the author of chapter one here, he's thinking back to Acts chapter five and this attitude that they espoused and embraced in 5 41 of Acts. They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. It harks back to Matthew chapter five and Luke chapter six and it looks forward to our passage.

Romans 8 17 and 18, if we are children of God, the spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children. And if children, then heirs. Heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

If. So many people never get past that part of the verse. The spirit bears witness, we're children.

And if children, then we are inheritors. We're going to get all kinds of wonderful benefits when we go to glory. We are heirs of God and we are co-heirs with Christ if every promise in the word of God, as far as I can tell, is conditional.

There is some condition that has to be met. People have to decide and choose and exercise faith of some kind to receive the fulfillment of God's promises. You will inherit with Christ if indeed we suffer as he suffered.

We suffer with him. We can't go back and live in the first century of this era and suffer with Christ chronologically and circumstantially, but we suffer as he suffered. Why was he persecuted? Why was he hounded? Why was he ultimately arrested, tried, convicted, and crucified? People didn't like his representation of God's righteousness.

They had a righteousness of their own and they didn't know how to embrace and express God's righteousness. They liked their kind. Righteousness by the works of the law.

Righteousness by an outward show when inside they're full of dead men's bones. They've whitewashed the outside, but they're a tomb. If indeed we suffer with him as in italics, we co-suffer.

We are co-heirs if we co-suffer so that we may also be glorified together, share in the glory of Christ, reflect the glory of Christ, and we're qualified to do so because we understand from experience the kind of suffering that he endured. He was rejected by those who have their own ideas about righteousness, and we suffer for that reason as well. So then in verse 18, I consider, I quote this, seems like every other Bible class.

Paul says, I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. To understand that comparison, the future glory has to be a reality. We have to believe it to the point that this present suffering dims the way it did for Abraham on the mountain.

That future is more real to me than present circumstances. I'm angling, I'm headed for, I'm investing in that future. The glory which shall be revealed in us.

You go forward in Romans 8 to verses 35 through 37. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or the threat of the sword? As it is written, for your sake, we are killed all the day long. We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

We lose everything. We're an object of, and a target of persecution, of dismissal at best, of hardship and difficulty at worst. Verse 37, Romans 8, yet in all these things, we are more than conquerors.

We're better than King David winning against the Philistines. We are better than any army victory. Joshua defeating the Canaanites.

We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us, who gave us this opportunity, the Lord Jesus Christ. What a powerful opportunity we have when we are taxed, when we are vexed, whether it is attack from others, whether it is circumstantial hardship, rejoice in that day, because think of what this is doing when we navigate it successfully by faith for our future opportunities, our future witness, our future service, our future hope, our future reflection of the glory of God. Couldn't get there if I didn't have this mountain to climb, if I didn't have this river to ford, if I didn't have this ravine and valley to negotiate, if I didn't have this difficulty to overcome, where would be my opportunity to invest in those things that can never pass away? An inheritance eternal and undefiled that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us.

What an opportunity, but the promise of God has to be more real to us than present circumstances. That's our challenge, that's our opportunity, that's what James invites us to recognize and apply in our lives. Well, we're going to pick up here at verse five next time, but we'll close in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you that you have counted us worthy to suffer for the name of Christ in whatever form or fashion it occurs in our individual lives. The simple existence that day by day follows a path of righteousness has an effect both positive and negative on those around us. We pray that we will be aware that it is by your grace and through the power of your spirit and the light of your word that we successfully negotiate each day that is granted to us in such a way that these promises can be fulfilled for us.

We thank you for the opportunity, we thank you for the Lord Jesus who showed us the way and we pray these things in his name, amen.