

James 25-05-11a

Greetings on this Mother's Day, the 11th of May, 2025, here at Grace & Truth Bible Church. Welcome all of you that have joined us today and those who will do so in the future. We are continuing this morning our study in the book of James, very fascinating epistle, unique in several ways, and the uniqueness, its particular characteristics, help us understand how to apply it in our own understanding, in our own experience, as we look at the circumstances of those to whom it was originally addressed, and its content is related to that audience and to their situation.

And in the same way that we study the Old Testament, we look at Israel, their situation, their circumstance, the context in which God speaks, God acts, God works in the nation. He is similarly at work in this community, and seeing what is there and what is not is a clue to help us balance the content of the book of James with that found in other New Testament epistles, because James is unique in several respects. We are going to delve into that further, and we are going to move forward beginning at verse 5 of chapter 1 this morning, James chapter 1 verse 5, and this is the request of faith, the request for wisdom in faith.

What is that all about? That's our topic this morning. Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study, and we'll begin. Father, it is so refreshing to spend time with believers who share an appreciation for the Lord Jesus, what He has done for us, the unique opportunities that have been granted to us in this age and at this time.

We understand that whatever faces us by way of challenge and trial is for our benefit and Your glory, and should be viewed as an occasion for rejoicing. We pray that as we move forward in this portion of Your Word, that God the Holy Spirit will bless it to each heart, help us to see clearly what we can do to improve our Christian walk, to be more faithful, more diligent, to learn and grow in grace and knowledge of our Savior, so that we are able to fulfill the potential that You have built into each of our lives. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. The book of James, we talked about this a little bit in the introduction to the book, is addressed to the 12 tribes that are scattered. There are several things that the book of James does not mention.

It does not, for example, mention the Lord Jesus, but twice. This is very unusual for a New Testament book. The incarnation of the Lord Jesus is not mentioned.

The death of the Lord Jesus is not mentioned. Atonement, redemption, propitiation are not addressed. The value of the earthly example of the Lord, how He walked and what He did, is not mentioned.

If it were not for the two mentions of the Lord Jesus, it has been said, it has been pointed out by more than one commentator, that this book could easily fit into the Old Testament rather than the New. There is a great emphasis on godly living, living according to the law of God. The

mentions of the law in most of the New Testament cast it in somewhat of a negative light.

The law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. By the law comes the knowledge of sin. By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Yet in James, the precepts of the law and the encouragements to godly living are positive. It has often been said that James seems to be written as a counterbalance or as a response to the doctrines of grace that the apostle Paul preaches so effectively in his letters. However, the other features of the book of James include the fact that it does not seem to be aware of the fall of Jerusalem.

It does not seem to be aware of the gospel being preached to the Gentiles, unlike Paul's letters or even the content of the Jerusalem council and the growth of the Gentile church, which has to be addressed in terms of the Jews being the first fruits unto God and we who were first to trust in Christ. And there needs to be an adjustment as the Gentile component of the church comes into view. None of that is mentioned or even hinted at in the book of James.

Therefore, based on these observations, people think James is quite early before the fall of Jerusalem, before the growth of the Gentile component of the church. So in the first generation of the church, obviously aware of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yakov here introduces himself as of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, a slave.

The Lord Jesus is mentioned twice. There are those who want to say, well, that was just added later, but it's a complete assumption. James said it.

He is a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. And yet the content is pitched directly to the Jewish people and exclusively to the Jewish people. There is no addressing whatsoever of interaction with Gentiles and avoiding meat offered to idols and what to do about those who are non-Jewish.

It's completely absent. So the estimate of when the book was written goes back to about AD 45. Most scholars will say James was written about AD 45.

If you recall the argument that James, the son of Zebedee, the brother of John, could not have written this letter because he was martyred so early. And the date of his martyrdom is AD 42. I find it interesting that people don't think James Ben Zebedee could have written it because he was martyred.

And yet the gap between when they think it was written and when James went to glory is at best about three years. And even those are estimates. But could James of Zebedee have written this in the last year of his life? The last couple of years of his life? Could it be a little bit earlier than they estimate? Of course.

So there's a lot of uncertainty about this. What we are certain of is this is addressed to the first generation of Jews who are not in Jerusalem. They are not subject to the apostolic witness in Jerusalem, Judea, or Samaria.

They are in the diaspora. And we saw that Jesus is thought to have been saying that he would go to the Jews of the diaspora when he told his audience that he was going to leave and where he went they could not follow. And they said, oh, is he going to the diaspora? This is in John, I believe, chapter eight.

And it was well known that there was a scattering of Jews beyond the borders of Israel before the time of the Lord Jesus. What does all of that mean? Why is it important? Because James is not a doctrinal book. It is not teaching the necessity of faith in Christ for salvation.

It does not talk about redemption, reconciliation, propitiation, being one in Christ, new covenant in his blood. Here's something that will surprise you. There is exactly zero mentions of the Holy Spirit in the book of James.

This is the age of the Holy Spirit, which was inaugurated by tongues of fire descending on the heads of people as an emblem of the presence and the power and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. No mention of the Holy Spirit anywhere in this letter. The Lord Jesus is named twice, but not discussed, not examined, not held up as an object of faith.

This is an intensely pragmatic, which is a fancy way of saying practical book about how to live. Why? One of the things that is a very prominent feature of the book of James is its parallels to the Sermon on the Mount. People are surprised by this, but if it is the earliest book of the New Testament to be written, and if its audience is Jews who are just emerging from the Old Testament day and are well aware of the importance of the law as the covenant between their people and God and its prescriptions and proscriptions in terms of moral living, righteous living.

Think about Jesus in the earlier part of his ministry. Matthew chapter 5, 6, and 7 is the Sermon on the Mount. To whom is he speaking? A strictly Jewish audience who are steeped in the law, but have been abusing the law, especially under the leadership of the scribes, Pharisees, chief priests, and elders of the people who have turned it into something it was never intended to be.

Wrongly understanding, interpreting, and applying the law of Moses. So the Lord Jesus begins by describing attitudes. Keep your finger in James and turn back to Matthew chapter 5. Where the Lord Jesus sees the multitudes, he goes on the mountain.

When he was seated, his disciples came to him. He opened his mouth and taught them. Taught whom? His disciples.

People like to picture the Sermon on the Mount as this, especially if you watch The Chosen, it is this big thematic introduction and there are just scads and scores and multitudes of people scattered all along the hillside. Matthew 5 begins, as we've seen, with only the disciples. Jesus climbs the mountain.

The disciples follow. They sit down and he teaches them, his disciples, saying, here are the ones who are blessed. And he doesn't start with the law.

Do this and thou shalt live. Dress this way. Eat this way.

Stay away from this. Only engage in that. Here is what is clean and what is unclean.

Here is what is sanctified and what is unholy. Here's what is in the camp and here's what must be outside the camp. Here are the laws.

Jesus says, being poor in spirit is blessed. Being unhappy with the status quo, mourning, there's something wrong and I feel bad about that. There is a sense of loss.

When you mourn, you typically mourn a loss. You mourn the status of something that isn't what it should be, isn't what one hoped it would be. But Jesus says, those who recognize that there is a problem, they don't consider themselves satisfied and well-off.

They're poor in spirit. If you're poor, what does that mean? You lack resources. There's something you need and you recognize that this is an occasion for godly sorrow, for regret in some cases, for the desire for a solution.

And the Lord Jesus says, if you recognize that your spirit is impoverished, you are blessed because God is going to fill that lack when the kingdom comes. You will have possession in the kingdom. You are blessed if you are mourning.

You care. It matters that there are these lacks and shortages. Context is everything.

It's not just random mourning. People can mourn the loss of a pet and they're not even saved. Not everyone who mourns over some abstract thing or some particular thing is blessed.

Those who are mourning because they are also poor in spirit. And that is the area of their mourning. I lack in the spiritual realm.

I want to be filled. I want to be comforted. And they will be, Jesus says.

Those who are humble, teachable, their power is under control. They're not rebellious. They are not pushy.

They are not trying to take the kingdom by force. They are going to inherit. In the earth.

Those who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness. This is why their spirit is poor. They recognize the need for righteousness and they mourn the fact that they can't generate a life that pleases God under their own steam.

All of these connect. One leads to another. Each follows what precedes.

Take them together. Why are you poor in spirit and mourning? Because you're hungry and thirsty for righteousness. That's the lack.

That's the sorrow. I want to live a life that pleads God, but I err and fall short again and again.

But if you're humble, if you recognize this need and you mourn over it, you're going to be comforted.

You're going to be filled. You're going to be satisfied. You're going to be in the kingdom and have possession and inheritance.

Future hope. That if you endure this suffering, this hardship of a spiritual nature. Isn't that what James begins with? Count it all joy when things are tough.

Because the testing of your faith, being faithful when hope is yet unfulfilled, is going to produce patience. And that patience is going to have its perfect work so that we can be perfect and complete and not lack anymore. Those things that make us poor in spirit, that cause us to mourn, that tempt us to try to build up something in our own strength and be proud of it.

We're saved by grace. We're delivered by grace. God provides for us by grace, lest any man should boast.

Humility doesn't boast. Humility doesn't think I'm all that and a box of fries. They will inherit.

They will be comforted. They will be filled. Blessed are the merciful.

We recognize that we're not the only ones in trouble. We are not the only ones who fail and fall short. And to be merciful, to be positively disposed toward others who are similarly impoverished.

God is merciful to us. We want to have an attitude of mercy and giving the benefit of the doubt to others. This is where we are so helped by our study of love and the spheres of love.

How merciful can we be? How loving can we be? Well, what sphere is someone in? Are they a one another where it will be reciprocal? Any one another command qualifies when the other is able to reciprocate. Love one another as I have loved you. It doesn't say love your enemy as I have loved you.

Does it? And there's a reason. Details matter. Blessed are the pure in heart.

These other things are qualifications and characteristics of those who are pure in heart. Remember when Jesus said, we saw this last week, that when the seed falls on the soil and it is received with a noble and good heart, it springs up and bears fruit. When the word comes, the word communicates hope.

Then we're in line for these blessings. And those who are pure in heart will see God. And to see God here means to grasp, to understand, to appreciate, to get it when it comes to the things of God.

Wow, what an opportunity. Do we want to cultivate a noble and good heart so that the seed of God's word will be implanted? The Holy Spirit will bless it and water it and it will bear fruit and

we will be qualified to see God. Jesus in another place says, if you confess me before men, not just verbally, but by your life, your light shining before men, you're up on the lampstand.

People are drawn to the light unless they love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. The Lord Jesus is a sword that separates those who love darkness and those who are drawn to light. We can live a life of light that draws others to God through Christ.

And the light reveals God. God is light, in Him is no darkness at all. And the Lord Jesus said, if you confess me before men, I will confess you before my Father.

You will be brought into the throne room and introduced by name. You will see God because you have a qualifying heart. It's a conditional promise.

Those who cultivate peace, who do peace, remember, this isn't so much peacemaker as peace-doer. It's the opposite of, you know, people say, I'm not stressed, I give stress. Well, we shouldn't say, I don't lack peace, I give peace.

When people are around me, peace spreads. It isn't conflict. It isn't taking sides.

It isn't opposition. There is peace. Paul says, the Lord Jesus is our peace.

God has accomplished reconciliation, unity, harmony through the Lord Jesus. And peace partakes of all of those aspects. So when people are around us, do they come away with a greater sense of peace? Or is there concern and worry? And well, I wonder if they really said what they meant.

I wonder, you know, is there an unexpressed concern? Is there jaundice? Is there bitterness in some area? The God of peace brings peace and spreads peace through those who have a pure heart, those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness. In my circumstance, in my conversation, in my responses and reactions, and my navigating through life and my fellowship with others, I want to be one who is an ambassador of peace, a peace doer, a peace presenter. That's a peacemaker.

That is a true son of God. We echo the work of the Lord Jesus, who reconciles us to God and reconciles us to each other and bridges the gap between Jews and Gentiles and males and females and slaves and masters and all other artificial divisions are dissolved and there is peace in Christ. One of his last promises to his disciples, as you recall, peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives.

It is a peace founded on eternal power and on the word of God and the presence of the spirit of God. It's a supernatural peace, a peace that passes understanding. The peace that passes understanding keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Think about these aspects. We could go on. There are a couple of dozen parallels, and I will note them as we go through the book of James, but already James chapter 1, verse 2, to

account it a cause for celebration when you fall into trials is echoed in the next verses of Matthew chapter 5, blessed are those who are persecuted, who suffer for righteousness' sake.

Not just any old, I put up a flag or a sign that had a righteous cause on it and I got persecuted. Take it in context. We hunger and thirst for righteousness.

That's our pursuit. That's our goal. We are endeavoring to be a peace spreader, a peace doer.

And if we are persecuted, if we are misunderstood and attacked for trying to qualify for these blessings in the first nine verses, you're blessed if people don't understand your life, don't understand your priorities. I think you ought to be doing this, but you're doing that because our priorities are guided by these nine previous verses. So if you are persecuted, not for any old abstract righteousness, for this righteousness, recognizing that I am the needy one, I don't need to go solve other people's problems before I have invited the Lord God to use his power to fix me, to get the beam out of my eye before I go moat hunting.

Right? If we're persecuted for righteousness' sake, not just the kingdom of God or possession on earth, but the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. What kind of sake, what aspect of the Lord Jesus are you falsely accused? People can say, you know, you're not active enough.

You're not participating in our program. I think of this, any of you that decided to graduate from a school and the alumni association comes after you and wants you to donate and make gifts and we'll put you on a list. We'll put your name on a brick.

What's the matter with you that you're not sending money to the school, which to me is particularly eyebrow raising when you went to a government funded school and served in uniform while you were going to that school and spent the next five or six years of your life paying the service back for your schooling. And then they say, please send us money. It's great.

People that want to, that believe in the mission of a service academy or whatever, God bless them. They want to do that with their resources, but don't imply that there's something wrong with me for not sending money to a school that is well and fully funded all by itself when I've got higher priorities of stewardship. But you could imagine that well-heeled and well-off and a greatly retired individuals who are very able to make bequests and gifts and so on, look at somebody and say, well, you know, I'm giving and all the rest of us are giving.

Why aren't you giving? And they would look askance and speak ill of you because you're not chipping in for their pet new project. We're going to expand the columbarium so that more people can be buried on the Naval Academy grounds. And it's going to require road reconstruction and the building of walls and temporarily shutdowns.

And all of this is going to take money and give, give, give, give till it hurts. That's fine. If an individual wants to do that out of their own heart and their own resources, God bless them.

But anybody who begins to pressure others and talk bad about others who aren't on board for that particular project, that's a, an example of the kind of attitude that Jesus is talking about in verse 11. They will revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you because you are trying to do the first 10 verses here. That's your priority.

I'm trying to get myself fixed. I want God's grace to come and fill my hunger and thirst for righteousness. I want to be one who has enough peace that I've got some left over to spread to others.

I want to be an oasis of peace for anyone in my periphery. And someone says, well, but you ought to be out here, elbows and knees and hammers and tongs and shovels and picks and, and get on our project, engage with our ministry and, and go out and, and meet and greet and visit and work. What is the proper attitude toward work? Well, this is what James is going to clarify.

And it is a parallel here. So when you are reviled or persecuted or evil spoken of, because you understand God's priorities and God's plans and purposes, and you are pursuing that. You're a member of a very small church.

Those of you that are with me this morning, certainly. So does somebody kind of say, what kind of church is that? Where's your building? Where's your baptistry? Where's your Sunday school building? Where's your, where are your pews? Where's your choir? Where's your parking lot? Where's your outreach? Where's your ministry? Where's your evangelistic push into the community? Where's your impact? And because we understand that God is at work among us and within us to accomplish his good purpose. And he's got any number of groups.

If he needs an organized ministry to do a thing, there are plenty of them. There are not very many groups that I know of, not to say they aren't out there. There could be 7,000 that haven't quote unquote bowed the knee to Baal.

But I am unaware of very many groups where the priority is to get into the word of God and get the word of God into me so that God can be at work to will and to do for his good purpose, not my assumed ideas about what his purposes are in the community or whatever else. And I look for the leading of the Lord and I look for the opportunities that he brings. And sometimes they come in very unexpected ways.

We lose a job. We have a change of venue. We have a bereavement.

We have a displacement. Things happen that seem to be trials. But in every case where we are faithful believers, when God is shutting some doors, he is always, without exception, opening others.

God doesn't limit us. God doesn't shut us down. If we are learning and growing, if we have divine resources in our soul and something the Holy Spirit can use to fix us and to activate our gift and our ambassadorship, our priesthood, our ministry functions, our love in these different

spheres, everything is in advance.

We are more than conquerors through him that loved us. And we are aligning ourselves for the overcomer blessings and opportunities in the future of Revelation 2 and 3, which are manifestly for the church. I was thinking about this.

We're reviewing a relatively old study of the book of Revelation. It's really a lot of fun. Something struck me.

I don't know if I've ever thought about it or mentioned it before. But remember that Jesus accosts John on the Isle of Patmos. And in John's visionary encounter with the Lord Jesus, he is holding seven stars in his hand and he is walking among the seven golden lampstands.

And they are representative of the church, the lampstands, the churches. The stars are the angels, the messengers of those churches. Here's my question.

What are stars? Why are they stars? Why doesn't he have seven books or seven rods or staffs or seven swords or seven anything could be in his hand? They are stars. What is the fundamental nature of a star as understood in Old Testament days and New Testament days? They are by definition a source of light. What is a lampstand in Old Testament days? A source of light.

So there are lampstands that Jesus walks among and there are sources of light in his hand. He is delivering the word of God. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path to these messengers, which they are then supposed to transfer to the angel of the church at Thyatira, right? To the messenger of the church of Ephesus, right? To the messenger of the church of Smyrna, right? And so on.

Light is coming from the unviewable face of the Lord Jesus. His face, John says in chapter one of Revelation, is like the sun at his strength, the noonday sun so bright you can't look at it. Light is coming from the Lord Jesus.

The sun is brighter than the stars, but the stars partake of sunlight. They are suns at a much greater distance we know now. But light goes from the Lord Jesus, his face, his words, to the stars and from the stars to the lampstands.

So what's supposed to happen? The word of the Lord Jesus through the ministry of messengers comes to the lampstand where it is supposed to be lit and to illuminate the area where that lampstand is placed. The Lord Jesus isn't going to go to every one of those towns. The messengers are there.

The light of God's word comes from the Lord Jesus to the star, the messenger, and from the messenger to the church where it is supposed to shine. That's a passive ministry in the community. It isn't an arm wielding a sword and I've got a sword in my hand.

I hand it to the messenger. He takes it to the church and the church wields a sword or a club or

a baseball bat or something else to buffet the community into compliance. It is a light that shines.

Those who are drawn to the light will be blessed by it. Those who love darkness rather than light will be repelled by it and may even attack it. You will have tribulation ten days, he tells the people in Smyrna.

You've got the synagogue of Satan. You've got Jezebel. You've got prophets like Balaam who are opponents.

Be faithful. You will receive a reward. Be an overcomer.

And not everyone is. So the book of James, being early, communicated to Jews this theme and this message is very similar to that which the Lord Jesus confronted Israel with in his early ministry. You have the law.

You have the principles. What you lack is the attitude to do these things from the heart and not out of external influence. I'm doing what I do to be seen by men.

Woe to you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites. You whitewash the outside. And our study that we started yesterday in Revelation, the author of it made a really good point.

And I was talking to Patty about this just the other day. The order of words makes a difference. And he said, instead of being whitewashed, as Jesus said the Pharisees were, we should be washed white.

Washed white. Our robes washed white and clean in the blood of the Lamb. But James doesn't mention the blood of the Lamb.

He is talking to Jews about what makes the works of the law acceptable in God's sight. It isn't merely the work. It is the attitude with which they are done, looking in hope, asking for wisdom, doing what we do as unto the Lord and not unto men.

That's what makes the difference. Not to please ourselves, not to please others, but to please the Lord. Old Testament believers could be incredibly faithful and wonderfully blessed by God, be a friend of God, to be one in the roster of the faithful in Hebrews chapter 11, similar to those examples.

That's what James appeals to. Take what you know and show me your faith as you truly live out the law, not in an artificial or hypocritical way, not to be seen by others or to impress someone, but with conviction from the heart as unto the Lord. We're going to see this explains the book of James.

By the way, being written somewhere in the first five years of the 40s A.D., it's not a response to Paul. Paul hasn't even talked about Hagar and Sarah and the son of the bondwoman and the son of the free woman. He hasn't talked about grace as opposed to works.

By the works of the law, no flesh. He hasn't written that yet. This is an appeal to those who already have the word of God to apply it properly.

Are we those who already have a great deal of the word of God? This book is this is how to get it done with what you know. And if you don't know, ask. That's coming up when we come back from the break.