

James 25-05-11b

Whenever you're ready. We resume our study here in the book of James and what we have perceived, what we have observed in the first session this morning is the Old Testament perspective that is freshened and made new with the coming of Christ. When he came in the incarnation and spoke to his people, Israel, in the Sermon on the Mount, he didn't discuss atonement, redemption, reconciliation, propitiation, wash your robes and make them white in the blood.

He didn't talk about the new and living way. He didn't address the Holy Spirit. And so when you come to people like Martin Luther, who really kind of thought James shouldn't be in the New Testament canon because it lacks a perspective or even a mention of so many of these things, should the Sermon on the Mount be in the New Testament? Obviously so, especially when you understand that the gospels are introducing people to the impending transition.

The Lord Jesus has come. The kingdom is at hand. Change your minds.

Believe the good news. Are you ready for the fulfillment of the covenant promises? We observe, interpret, and apply based on understanding God's dealings with his Old Testament people, Israel. We are not Israel.

We are not under law, but under grace. We have a new covenant founded on new and better promises. We do understand what God was doing at the cross with the Lord Jesus in his death.

Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. It was predicted. It was prospective.

It was future. It was a hope that there would be a Messiah, that there would be a Redeemer, that there would be one who would fulfill and bring to fruition the Old Testament program that God had with his people, Israel. Sadly, Israel was not ready.

And how many times have I emphasized this? In my view, as goes the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, so goes the individual believer in the new. James is an appeal to the first century Jewish Christians who aren't in Jerusalem. They're in the Diaspora.

With the coming of Christ, you should understand and believe the truths of the Sermon on the Mount, that you should be living a life that is lawful and mindful of God's presence and God's purpose, God's covenant, God's righteousness. You do so in faith. And I'm not going to teach you a bunch of doctrines as a foundation.

I'm not converting you from idolatry to serve the living God like the Gentiles will be. You already know God. And there is enough Old Testament truth.

I was quoting Romans. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures and that he was buried and that he was raised again the third day according to the scriptures. These Old Testament truths are sufficient to recognize Christ, to accept him as Savior, and to activate your

Old Testament understanding.

There's nothing wrong with the law. The law is holy, righteous, and good. It's me that's broken.

Paul says, the law is a schoolmaster to bring me to Christ. There's nothing wrong with the law, but I am carnal, sold under sin. I need empowerment.

I need cleansing. I need enablement. So what is the exhortation? As Yaakov, as Jacob or James, we call him, launches into this letter.

He says, my brothers, my fellow Jews, my brethren, my Israelite family who are scattered abroad, I serve God. I serve the Lord Jesus Christ. And I bring you a message from them.

I have the authority that comes from being given a message from God and the Lord Jesus Christ to you. What is that message? You are obviously in harsh circumstances. It may be unfair.

It may be unjust. It is definitely unkind. You are rejected.

You are limited. You're not in the land. You're not availing yourself of the temple and the other accouterments that still survive, even under Roman rule, a benefit of being in the land.

You can't go to an assembly feast in Jerusalem. You're out. You're in an outpost and you're very limited.

And in many cases you are misunderstood, excoriated. We watched the movie Quo Vadis last night, which is set in the 60s of the AD era. And they picture Paul and they picture Peter and Robert Taylor and Deborah Carr are there.

And Robert Taylor is a Roman centurion, a victorious general. And Deborah Carr is the daughter of a king, but she was taken hostage when Lygia, her country, was conquered. And she's been living with a couple that has come to faith in Christ, a Roman couple, and adopted as their daughter.

And of course, Robert Taylor takes a fancy tour, if you remember that movie. But the Christians end up being blamed for the burning of Rome. And Peter Ustinov, in a very classic performance, the one that probably is more memorable than any other he ever did, is Nero.

And it takes you back to those days when Christians lived a very difficult life outside the land of Israel, where their religion was not understood. And if they came to faith in Christ, they were soon thought to be insurrectionists and opponents who would refuse to confess the deity of the Caesar and so on. And James is writing, this is before the time of Nero, in the 40s, it's 20 years before that, but to gain practice and to be prepared for what might happen.

Most of the people who received this letter are going to be alive in the days of Nero, are going to be alive in the days of active persecution and capital punishment and lions and the sword and bloodshed and being vilified because they claim the name of Christ. If you haven't seen

that movie or haven't seen it lately, it's worth a look. But when you encounter hardship, don't feel sorry for yourself, celebrate.

This is a chance for God to build me, to edify me, to make me strong. In my weakness, God's strength is made manifest, Paul says. Three times he prayed that his thorn in the flesh would be removed.

God said, my grace is sufficient for you. And in your weakness, my strength is made evident. Wouldn't you love to be an evident example of the power of God shining forth and drawing others to God through Christ? What a privilege, what an opportunity.

Should we not welcome that? Should we not rejoice in it and be glad that God has counted us fit, able, and worthy to fulfill that role? So my brothers, account it an occasion for celebration. Judge it a positive thing. This is good, honest, noble, true, lovely, and of good report that you're facing hardship.

However fair or unfair it may be, it is an occasion for the power of God to be manifest in us, for us to be distinguished from the world and from those who don't understand the opportunities that God gives us in Christ. Knowing in verse three, so important. If you haven't already circled this and put asterisks next to it, at least mentally do so.

This is only doable knowing that this is a part of God's plan to advance us, to mature us, to make us perfect and complete, lacking nothing. This is the way. You cannot be perfect and complete, lacking nothing without hardship, without the trial of your faith, without the production, the development of patience.

Anybody can be patient when there's no challenge. Anybody can be peaceful when there's no disruption. Anybody can sit in the boat when nothing is rocking it.

What do you do when the chips are down? What do you do when it's unfair, unjust, unkind, intolerable? What are you like? Account it an opportunity from God to be filled with his power and his presence through his word and his spirit, and to be a blessing to others in enduring that hardship. You'll be perfect and complete. You will lack no good thing.

Go back to Matthew chapter five. Start with poor in spirit, mourning, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, working toward being someone. First of all, we recognize our own lack and God fills it.

Now we can be merciful. Now we can be peace spreaders, peace doers, peacemakers, if you will, but not in the sense of arbitrating a treaty. We are a source of peace to others.

We begin by being filled in those first few verses, and we end by shining it to such an extent that people recognize us as representing Christ and may even attack us for it. You're persecuted for my name's sake. Happy are ye.

Rejoice. Who wants to be persecuted? Those scenes are vivid in the movie. That movie was made, I believe, in 1951, but it's in Technicolor, and it's a wonderful telling of a story.

One or two things I would leave out. You'll know them when you see them, but very few and far between. So look at verse five.

With that background, with that connection, you really need to keep Matthew chapter five in mind, especially the Beatitudes, starting James, because they are of a peace. I believe that James, the son of Zebedee, who sat in the audience and heard Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and is informed by it. James never heard Paul preach.

James, the brother of John, the son of Zebedee, never heard the apostle Paul. He heard the Lord Jesus, and the Lord Jesus' preaching was to Israel, presenting the kingdom, presenting the proper life fueled by the Old Testament scriptures, the law, the prophets, and the writings. And James is speaking the language of Matthew five, six, and seven.

To the same type of audience. Verse five, if any of you lacks wisdom, context, context, context, what kind of wisdom? Knowing, in verse three, knowing what faith produces, knowing what patience entails, having enough divine perspective to count it all joy, to account it a cause for celebration. That doesn't come to the normal human spirit.

It doesn't come to the secular mind. It doesn't come to the materialist, or the secularist, or the humanist. That perspective that can view adversity as a positive thing, so positive that you get excited, and it brings a smile to your mental face.

All right, this is it. I, my name has been called. It's my turn.

God is watching to see what I'm going to do with this situation. All right, let's get with it. I've received my cue.

I'm under observation now. This is my chance. This is my test to pass, and pass well.

I want an A. I want an A plus. Give me the extra credit question. Why? Because I know some things.

Now, if I begin to discern that I don't have enough wisdom, I don't have enough knowledge, my knowing is not sufficient to fuel a positive attitude in adversity, what should I do? I'm not sure my knowledge is up to the task. I'm having trouble remembering what I know. I'm not able to sustain this joy.

I'm not really doing very well in the patience department here. What is the measure of how well my faith is operating? You know, James is famous for, I will show you my faith by my works. What is the work? What does Paul say? God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith, your patience of hope, and your labor of love.

Patience and hope are linked. Hope, patience, patience, hope. Hope is fueled by information,

knowing the promises of God, remembering the promises of God, experiencing the reality of that which is not seen.

Faith and hope, eventuating in love, and manifest in patience. One of the expressions of patience in every sphere of love is evidence of our faith. We have faith in propositional truths, promises, principles, doctrines, and our faith, the measure of our faith.

Examine yourself and see if you're in the faith. If you're in the faith, you know what one of the prominent symptoms of faith is? Patience. Remember the definition we had last time.

I do not get angry or upset when there is delay, when there is disappointment, when there is trouble. I don't get angry or upset. I endure, I wait, I am patient.

Patience is fueled by faith. Knowing the testing of your faith produces patience. They're inextricably linked.

Patience comes from faith, and faith under pressure. Anybody can have an abstract faith that isn't tested, isn't tried, isn't put under any weight. You can have a wonderful balsa wood piece of furniture, and it looks great as long as you don't sit on it.

Faith under pressure, evidences, brings out, brings to fruition patience, and that patience makes us complete, lacking nothing. If you lack wisdom, this goes back to verse three and verse four. If you find that you're struggling with patience, you're struggling with counting it all joy, what's the recourse? Well, I've got to take action.

I've got to take up arms against the sea of troubles. I love that soliloquy out of, you know, to be or not to be, and so on. Is it nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take up arms against the sea of troubles, and by opposing, end them? We tend to want to make something happen.

I'm going to call somebody. I'm going to talk to somebody. I'm going to spend some money here.

I'm going to shift this and move that, and I'm going to change the game. I'm going to, I don't like the way the chess game's going. I'm going to kick the board and scatter everything and everybody.

I'll fix this. What do we do when we realize that the thing is getting ahead of us? I'm not joyful. I'm not celebrating.

I don't feel the reality of that hope. Patience is not having its perfect work in me, and I don't feel complete, and I feel that I do lack. What should I do? The answer is right here in verse five.

If we struggle with the fruition of our Christian faith under pressure, what do you do? Verse five. If you lack wisdom, lack of wisdom is the problem because you have to know. What did Paul say? I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able.

You can just stop right there. I know God, and I know his ability. I know something.

He's going to keep that which I commit to him against that day, that future day of evaluation, of judgment, of opportunity, of future service, and reflection of the glory of God. I know whom I have believed. I am persuaded of what his abilities are.

He's got this. If I lack that knowledge, if I lack that wisdom, that certainty, what do I do? If you lack wisdom, any of you, whatever your situation, rich, poor, slave, free, Jew. All of these are Jews he's talking to.

Ask of God. Go to the source. Ask of God.

Ask and it shall be given. This is Jesus pre-cross. Ask and it shall be given.

Seek and you will find. He's talking to Old Testament believers when Jesus says that. Ask, God will give.

Seek, God will enable you to find. Knock, God will open the door. Ask, you have not because you ask not, Jesus said.

You ask amiss that you consume it on your personal desires. Well, I know what I want. How do our desires stack up to what God wants? Why God put us on this earth? Why God put us where we are in the circumstance we face today? Who am I? Why am I here? The answers are found in God.

If you lack wisdom, wisdom grants perspective. Wisdom grants power to celebrate, to consider, to judge, to view as true a particular circumstance in the light of God's perspective. If you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.

Go to the source. What do we know? Now James is gonna give us something we know about God. What do you know about God if you ask him? If you ask him for something that he tells you to ask for, God is saying right here, this is God speaking.

If you don't have the knowledge you need, if you don't have the perspective, the strength and the wisdom that comes from the promises, principles and doctrines in the hands of the Holy Spirit, come ask me because I give. God gives to all generously, liberally. If you have a cup and you haven't got enough wisdom in it, ask of God and you'll be like David in Psalm 23.

My cup overflows. I have more than a sufficiency. I have a superfluity.

Ask of God. He will give beyond what you ask for, beyond what you think you need. Just ask.

You have not because you don't ask. You turn to other solutions, other sources, other ideas, other viewpoints. Any godless unbeliever can do accessibility to the ways of the world.

Human strength, human ideas, human perspective, human solutions. If you don't have the

knowledge that gives you that celebration perspective and patience to endure to the end, you have need of patience so that after you have suffered a while, you inherit the promises of God. This is a fact of scripture.

We need patience. I want patience. In order to get patience, I've got to endure some testing of my faith.

And when that test comes, all right, this is the way to be perfect and complete. Lacking nothing to qualify for all of the inheritance promises in Matthew chapter five and Revelation chapter two and three that James never saw either. His brother John hadn't written the Revelation when James checked out.

But I believe he wrote this. And he said, if you don't have the knowing this, ask of God. God will give beyond what you can ask or think.

He will give liberally and without reproach. He's not gonna say, you know, that was covered in a Bible class three weeks ago. Where were you? Did your mind drift? Were you distracted? Did you fall asleep? Did you not take good notes? I just told you this three weeks ago.

God will not reproach if we come to Him and ask. And we understand what we're asking for and why we are asking for it. He will give generously and He won't rebuke us.

Liberally and without reproach. And it will be given to him. Ask and it shall be given.

Do you see the close parallel? James as a disciple of the Lord Jesus who didn't hear any other New Testament preaching. He probably heard Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. But very shortly thereafter, before Paul ever gets underway, James is called home.

It will be given him. But, verse six, everybody says, James is the book of works. Paul is the man of faith.

Paul talks about the value of faith. Paul is the guy, you know, by grace through faith. James is, you got to work, you got to show.

If you're gonna have faith, the only way we'll know it is works. What does James say about faith here? Let him ask in faith. The testing of your faith produces the test of your faith.

The test of your faith produces patience. If you're having trouble with patience, ask of God, but you got to ask in faith. You're not gonna get patience without faith.

If your knowledge is not up to the task, ask God for wisdom, but ask in faith. You never get away from faith in James. James doesn't go to works without faith.

I will show you my faith by my works, but I've got faith. James is not anti-faith in any way, shape or form. The one who lacks wisdom, let him ask of God and ask in faith, nothing doubting, no doubting.

I like the old King James, nothing doubting. I know when I ask God for wisdom, I've got a tough situation here. I'm not real sure how to proceed.

I can see hazards with any option I select. I just, I don't know what God wants me to do. Ask, nothing doubting.

He who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. If you don't ask of God and then sit and wait, it's a faith test and it takes patience. And when you ask of God, you've got to wait for his answer.

Don't ask him and then immediately begin blowing with every wind. Oh, a dove flew over. Maybe God wants me to have a Holy Spirit impulse.

Oh, a cat walked by. Maybe God wants me to get closer to the ground and have an earthy answer. You know, people just go off half-cocked.

Ask in faith, nothing doubting. And if you don't doubt, then you will wait patiently for God's answer. Let not that man suppose, verse seven, that he will receive anything from the Lord if he doesn't really believe God is going to provide.

In God's time, in God's way, ask of the Lord. And notice it doesn't say keep on asking, pester the Lord daily, pray three times a day for the very same thing. It's great to pray three times a day, but God heard you the first time.

God doesn't need a reminder. He's not forgetful. And I don't believe prayer is any more effective for its repetition.

I think if you want to bring up another issue or the same issue before the Lord another time, approach it from a fresh angle. Lord, I was reading your word this morning, and here's another reason why my request is this. I learned in reviewing or in reading your word that this is an aspect.

It's not only a comfort to this person, but it can be a witness to that person. Feel free to make fresh arguments to the Lord for why we would like things to turn out a certain way. And always end with not my will, but thine be done.

But God loves it when we explore his word and show him that we know it, that we're paying attention to it, that we believe it, and we're expecting him to act in accordance with it. God loves that. Don't ask in a doubtful way, well, I'm gonna send up a prayer.

I don't know if God's listening. I don't know if he's gonna. If you pray for wisdom, you can be 110% sure God is going to grant that wisdom.

Wait for it. Don't get ahead of it. Don't assume it.

Don't game it. Wait for it. He will give generously above what you imagine.

And he's not gonna scold you for asking or waiting to ask. If you ever get around to asking, God is so happy to hear from us. He's not gonna scold us.

He's just gonna give us more than we ask for. Let him ask in faith with no doubting. He who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

The wind is the chaotic, uncontrollable planetary force. It's earthy. It's earthy.

It's thermal inversions. It's mountains and seashores and things that are well beyond our ability to have any say so over. Isn't it something that we can be a well-set post in concrete? It doesn't matter which way the wind blows.

It doesn't drive us. It doesn't move us. Love that old gospel song.

I shall not be, I shall not be moved. Just like a tree that's planted by the waters, I shall not be moved. Jesus is my savior.

I shall not be moved. I'm in his love and favor. I shall not be moved.

I'm like a tree that's planted by the waters. I shall not be moved. My faith is unshakable.

I know whom I have believed. I know what I've committed to him. I know what his promise is and I have the confident expectation I can ask him for wisdom and I will be ready when it comes.

Let not that unfaithful man, that doubting man think he's gonna get anything from the Lord. The condition of the granting of the request is unshaking faith, unwavering faith. Ask for it.

Have absolute confidence that it is going to be answered and sit tight. Somebody who doubts, who isn't real sure God's listening, who isn't sure God's gonna answer the request, let not that man think he's going to get anything from the Lord, wisdom or anything else. Your provision is on the line.

Your future blessings and rewards are on the line. Those can be lost. Witness Israel, promised a presence and a king in the land so long as they were faithful.

They broke the condition and they broke the covenant. They don't have the land or a king. Assyrian captivity, Babylonian captivity, Roman oppression and so on.

Because verse eight, a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. You can't be used by God to be a blessing to others. You're not going to be a peace spreader.

You're not going to be able to be merciful and a blessing to others. You're not going to be a witness that is so visible bearing the name of Christ that others begin to attack you because Jesus said, if they hate me, they're gonna hate you. Well, they won't hate us if we don't represent Christ.

They can hate Christ and think we're just fine. What's the matter with that picture? Am I not sufficiently Christ-like? Am I not a representative that those who are dismissive of Christ, they ought to be dismissive of me. If they think disparagingly of Christ and Christianity, how come they don't think disparagingly of me? Because I don't fully represent it, that's why.

When people see us, they should see Christ. And if they hate Christ, they ought to hate us. And we ought to be glad for it.

Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you for my name's sake. You're wearing my name. And if people hate Christ and they don't hate us, there is something wrong.

James is so practical, so applicable, so important for the basics. Before you ever get to the Holy Spirit, before you ever get to the advanced doctrines that are in Romans and Philippians and Colossians and Ephesians and Corinthians and Hebrews, 1st, 2nd, 3rd John, 1st and 2nd Peter, much less the Revelation, which is wonderfully advanced, wholesome doctrines. Where is our Old Testament knowledge? Where are the basics, the fundamentals? Christ died for our sins according to the Old Testament scriptures.

He was buried and raised again the third day according to the Old Testament scriptures. Those were the scriptures that fueled his humanity through the greatest test that any human being has ever faced. For this reason, God has highly exalted him, given him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, a name that we ought to bear, every knee should bow, every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

We wanna be a part of that. This is the how-to. The test we face, large or small, testing of your faith produces patience.

Knowing this, if you don't know it, ask for wisdom and get the knowledge, and then pass the test. If you've got doubt and you don't have faith and you can't get to patience, you're in trouble. You're not gonna receive anything from the Lord.

You've disqualified yourself. You've failed to meet the conditions. This is critical.

This is central. This is essential day by day by day. We have got to know this, and we have got to work this truth every hour of every day that the Lord gives us till the return of the Lord Jesus, which is either the rapture or our last breath, which is immediately followed by the rapture.

No more central truth than this, even beyond the truths of Jesus that James doesn't even need to mention. Faith in God is central. We live by faith.

James is a faith book. Can you see it in these first eight verses? He is all about faith, and so should we be. We'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for this day. We thank you for those that brought us forth into this world and exercised their maternal care, and especially those who did it heartily as unto you and

endeavored to prepare us for a life and service and function as believers. We thank you for our mothers, and we ask a special blessing on those who survive into the present that you'll be with them in a special and meaningful way on this day and in every day of the future that remains to us.

We thank you for this truth from your word. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will enliven it, give it substance and meaning, and a fire in our bosom as we consider it so that we can live this life in a way that pleases you, that brings us to perfection, to qualification for service and function now and in the ages to come. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.