**The Epistle of James – Week One**

James 1:1-18

The Epistle of James is thought to have been written by the half-brother of Jesus, who led the Jewish Christian church in Jerusalem for nearly 30 years after the resurrection, until, according to the secular historian Josephus, he was martyred by stoning at the hands of the Sanhedrin (Jewish ruling council) in A.D. 62.

1. Trace James’ change of heart concerning Jesus in John 7:2-5, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, and Acts 15:12-21. How does this insight into James affect your reading of James 1:1? What do you learn about him and about his epistle?

James’ unbelief in Jesus as the Messiah is radically changed by Jesus’ appearance to him after the resurrection, in much the same way that it changed Paul. James now considers himself a “bond-servant,” or slave, of his Lord Jesus Christ. We see this in Acts 15, as James exercises his authority in the church. A very Jewish son of Joseph fully embraces the inclusion of the Gentile Christians, and sees Christ’s fulfillment of the words of the prophet Amos which he quotes to the Jerusalem church elders. He ‘gets’ Jesus’ heart toward all He came to save.

This particular epistle was written to those Jewish Christians who had been scattered by persecution which came upon the church in Jerusalem. They too are in the heart of James and of His Lord.

Note: the word ‘Greetings’ is from the Greek ‘chairo,’ or ‘Rejoice, Be glad.’ This leads right into James’ discussion of joy to those believers who were undergoing trials and persecution.

1. Read v.2-4.

The last word in verse 3 is from the Greek word ‘hupomone’ – patient endurance, steadfastness, perseverance. Literally, the word is “to live, tarry, dwell under.” The working of your faith is said to produce this ability to live and bear up, and even to flourish, under situations of duress.

Think of a time when you experienced endurance in a difficult situation. How would you describe this experience of endurance?

Answers vary. Joy comes from the knowledge that God uses all things, whether trials or good things, to bless us. Refer to Romans 8:28. This is a promise of God. His purposes of love and goodness will overcome any evil. John 1:4-5.

In verse 2, James says to consider it ‘joy’ to undergo trials. It is foreign to human nature to know joy in the midst of trial. Feelings of sadness or happiness come according to circumstance, but joy is different, deeper than feeling.

How can a joyful action toward someone in the midst of trial remind them of a deeper reality that brings joy?

Again, answers vary: the care and love of Christ; the communion of saints/we are not alone, or rejected; sharing the assurance that the Lord will bring His children through times of suffering.

Verse 4 says that we will grow to be “lacking in nothing.” What kinds of things might you lack in the midst of suffering? What does each of these things have to do with endurance?

Allow others to share. Endurance is character that brings about patience, strength, clinging to and resting in the love of Christ, bringing certainty and rejecting doubt, bringing comfort, encouragement, hope.

1. Read v.5-12.

In our sermon on these verses, Pastor Gabe pointed out that wisdom in the midst of suffering teaches us to release our grip on things that fade, and forces us to stare into beautiful, hopeful, eternal truths.

From these verses, what are these truths? What reasons do we have to hope in the midst of trials?

v.5 – God will give wisdom generously when we ask.

v.6-8 – Asking in faith will preclude the experience of being tossed about, double-minded, and unstable.

v.9-11 – We can glory in humble circumstances and humiliation. God does not prove his provision by riches or high position. In fact, these earthly things will pass away, fade, wither, be destroyed.

v.12 – Perseverance; receiving the crown of life promised by Christ.

1. Read v.13-18.

The question of suffering in, “Why?” It is tempting to find reasons for suffering. What are some reasons, perhaps bad reasons, that you have heard people give for circumstances of trial, pain, illness, death? How are these reasons contradicted by verse 17?

God is testing me – he wants me to prove that I am a true believer./God is always a giver. He provides good things and perfect gifts in the midst of evil and temptation, such as a way out of it (1 Corinthians 10:13). He tells us to flee temptation (2 Timothy 2:22-23).

God is pruning me – he sent this bad thing to make me better./God in his goodness does not send things that are evil. He may allow them, but protects us in the midst of them. See Job 1,2.

Is disease, illness, cancer what God intended (Genesis 1,2)? No, it is the result of fallen creation, which longs to be restored. Romans 8:19-23.

How does the reality of constancy in the Father bring comfort? What is constant?

The Father is not capricious, or treating us like pawns for other purposes that don’t consider His great concern for us. He always, always gives goodness and intends love. What is constant (v.17): goodness; perfection of His gifts; their origin from heaven; light.

Verse 18 says that the Father exercised his will, not to tempt us, but, through the word of truth (the Gospel of Christ), to “bring us forth,” that is, to create an eternal life in us that comes from faith in Christ. How does living out this life of faith in the midst of trial bring life to others?

The fruits of our faith give testimony to the giver of our faith. We have all wondered at the faithfulness of others in the midst of trial, and even perhaps in ourselves. What is getting me through this situation? How am I making it? It causes others to question the origin of our endurance, and increases our wonder toward the Lord. It draws us and others closer to him.