

# James

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Introduction – Count It Joy

June 12, 2011

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## I. Introduction

- A. **James 1:1-4** . . . James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. [2] Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, [3] knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. [4] And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.
- B. Let us pause and ask God to make this study of James profitable to us so that we may grow in spiritual understanding and maturity and be adequate and equipped for every good work.
- C. The exact date when James was written is not known. There are guesses ranging from the late 40's A.D. to the early 60's A.D. We know it had to be written before James death in 68 A.D.
  - 1. This letter, as stated in the first verse, is a general letter to Christian Jews spread around the Roman Empire, and possibly beyond.
    - a. Of course, we read it as if it is written to us, because God saw fit to make it part of the Holy Scriptures.
    - b. And it is God, himself, who says: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (**II Timothy 3:16-17**).
  - 2. There are several themes or emphasis found in James, but today I want to point out just two of them.
    - a. First, James places an emphasis on living the Christian life, that is, on the inner and outward manifestations of being a Christian. In fact, he makes a point of saying that knowing the truth is not enough. We must do the truth. For as Jesus said, doing the truth is the only way to build our lives on the security of the rock instead of the false hope of the sand (**Matthew 7:24-27**).
    - b. Second, Christian faith must and will be accompanied by a consistent lifestyle. As James makes clear, faith that does not show itself in what we do and how we live is dead faith or useless faith when it comes to God and eternal life. In other words, the proof that we believe in God for salvation and eternal life is in having a faith that moves us from living for ourselves to living for God – day in and day out.

D. James 1:1 . . . James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.

1. Who is the author of James?

a. This James is not the brother of John and the son of Zebedee. James, the brother of John was martyred by Herod about 44 A.D. We know this from **Acts 12:1-3** . . . Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. [2] And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. [3] When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread.

b. According to most Church historians, the writer of James was a brother of Jesus, and the same James that was selected by the Apostles to be the Bishop or Head Elder of the Jerusalem church.

2. James was martyred at the Passover in 68 A.D. The destruction of Jerusalem, seemingly foretold in **James 5:1, 9** (*[1] Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. [9] . . . behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.*) happened a year after James martyrdom, in 69 A.D.

a. According to Eusebius, James was taken up and set on a pinnacle of the temple by the scribes and Pharisees. They then urged him to tell the people below to stop embracing Christianity.

b. They also asked James to point out the door through which Jesus would enter Jerusalem upon His return (*a reference to James 5:9*). James replied loud enough to be heard by the people below, "Why ask me concerning Jesus the Son of man? He is sitting at the right hand of power, and will come again on the clouds of heaven." The crowd below responded by crying aloud, "Hosanna to the Son of David."

c. At this, James was thrown down, head first, by the Pharisees. Upon hitting the ground, he began praying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," as the Pharisees gathered around him and stoned him to death. It is said that he did not die from the fall or the stoning, but from finally having his head bashed open by a fuller's club or staff – the wood rod used by those who dyed wool and cloth to stir and lift the cloth from the dye.

d. It has been thought by many in the early church that Hebrews 13:7 (*Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.*) refers to James following his martyrdom.

3. We see a quality in James that ought to be in every Christian. This quality is humility. If it is hard for you to see the value or importance of humility, remember that it was for the single sin of pride that God condemned Lucifer to eternal damnation in the Lake of Fire. And the scriptures says that God resists or is opposed to the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. Which do you need? God's resistance or grace? Humility will bring on God's grace whereas pride will bring on His resistance.
  - a. Notice, James identified himself as a servant (doulos) – a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - b. This is the same James who was a brother of Jesus and the designated Head Elder in the Jerusalem church – the church that was started on the day of Pentecost and originally led by the disciples of Christ. In other words, James had the right to point to his family of origin and his position in the church when identifying himself to his readers.
  - c. But instead of pointing out he was a person of importance by laying claim to such things as would make him appear important in the eyes of the world, he pointed to his unimportance in the sight of God and in the church. You see, James saw himself as God's servant, not the church's leader. And he saw himself as the servant of Jesus Christ whose role was to serve the church, not rule over it.
  - d. This says something important about James attitude toward himself in relation to God and toward his fellow Christians. And in the same way, humility on our part says a lot about our mindset concerning our relationship with God and our role in the church.
4. By the way, Jude took this same high road of humility when he identified himself at the beginning of his letter. We read in **Jude 1:1** . . . Jude, a **bond-servant of Jesus Christ**, and brother of James, to those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ . . .

## II. Count It All Joy

- A. **James 1:2-4** . . . Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, [3] knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. [4] And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

B. Notice, the very first thing James brings up in his letter is this matter of considering it or counting is all joy when trials and tribulation come along. Why? Because they test our faith. And when faith is tested, it requires endurance to pass the test. But when we pass test after test, we strengthen our endurance to the point of reaping Christian perfection. Once again, this is James opening statement to the believers.

1. He doesn't point to who we are in Christ, or what we have in Christ, or how much God loves us, or the forgiveness and grace God pours out on us when we sin, or some of the blessings and benefits of becoming a Christian. Instead he makes godly character – with Christian perfection as its goal, his first concern in this letter.
2. And in addressing Christian perfection, he starts with trials and tribulation and ties them to faith. He then ties faith to the Christian virtue of endurance (or perseverance). And he finishes by tying endurance to Christian perfection or completeness in the Christian life here on earth.
3. Now you may be thinking that there is no such thing as Christian perfection or living a perfect and sinless Christian life – no matter how many trials you endure, and how great your faith is, and how long you are a Christian.
  - a. If this is what you are thinking, I agree with you. Sinlessness in this life for any extended length of time – such as a year or several years or a decade or even longer – is unheard of in the church, and probably impossible.
  - b. Besides, we know that God made a way for us Christians when we sin by providing the opportunity for confession and repentance leading to forgiveness of sin. So I am not taking these words of God here in **James 1** to mean we can or even ought to arrive at sinless perfection in this life.
4. What I am taking these words to mean is that Christian perfection ought to be our often stated and actively pursued goal.
  - a. God makes this same truth clear in **I John 2:1-2** . . . My little children, I am writing these things to you **so that you may not sin**. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; [2] and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.
  - b. And again God says in **I John 3:4-8** . . . Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. [5] You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him

there is no sin. [6] No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. [7] Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; [8] the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

5. I don't think any of us would openly profess that our supreme goal is to live a mediocre Christian life where sin abounds, and thankfully grace abounds more. But if we listen to what we say, what message do we get? I fear we are more likely to speak of God's grace in forgiving and accepting us in spite of our sin than we are to speak of God's grace in strengthening us to endure hardship and resist temptation so as to remain faithful in living a godly life. The problem with this is when we speak this way, the emphasis is on accepting or even normalizing the fact of sin in the Christian life, which by its very nature makes it almost impossible to normalize a serious and even zealous pursuit of Christian perfection.
  - a. Yet both truths are important truths. God's grace does overcome sin in the Christian's life. And God's grace does empower us to live a godly, holy, mostly sin-free Christian life.
  - b. Here in **James 1:2-4**, God is calling our attention to the path He has designed for us to go from immaturity to Christian maturity, from weakness to spiritual strength, and from a life ruled by sin to a life ruled by righteousness. And that path takes us through faith testing trials and tribulations.

C. Consider it all joy:

1. Joy in what? The trials and tribulations? No, for that is the denial of reality. So then, joy in what? Joy in the result of remaining faithful and obedient to God all the way through the trials and tribulations. But to find joy in hard times, we must treasure the outcome of tested faith and increased endurance. We must treasure the reality of becoming more and more Christ-like, spiritually mature, sinless as much as it is humanly possible to be sinless, and God pleasing in thought, word, and deed – as much as possible in this life.
2. You see, there is no joy in the trial itself any more than there is joy in chemotherapy or radiation therapy itself. But when these painful paths bring us to the place of being cancer free, we find joy in them.

In this same way, to count trials and tribulation joy, we must value the spiritual outcome of their presence in our life.

3. We see this in the life of Jesus, who “for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame” (**Hebrews 12:2**).
4. And Peter addresses this same issue in **I Peter 1:3-9** . . . Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [4] to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, [5] who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. [6] In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, [7] so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; [8] and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, [9] obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

D. The testing of our faith produces endurance:

1. What does it mean to test our faith?
  - a. Trials and tribulations, hard times and difficult circumstances challenge our confidence in God’s goodness – and especially His goodness as shown in His provision and protection. The moment our confidence in God is challenged, our faith is being tested.
    - (1) Will we depend on God to bring some great or greater good out of our situation,
    - (2) or will we take matters into our own hands and act on our own behalf to try and fix the problem or remove the suffering or stop the pain or end the relationship?
  - b. Now the problem of moving away from trusting in God and moving toward trusting in ourselves is that we cannot move away from faith in God without moving away from obedience to God. And we cannot move toward trusting in self without moving toward selfishness – and selfishness always leads to sinful solutions to our problems and sinful forms of gratification for our desires.

- c. So our faith is tested when we are in a situation that is of such a nature as to make us choose between continued trust in God's goodness or switching from faith in God to trusting in ourselves and our ability to look out for our own happiness and well-being.
2. How does tested faith produce endurance? First of all, tested faith only produces endurance when we pass the test.
  - a. But it works like this – each time we pass the testing of our faith, we become more confident in God's provision and protection, and our faith grows stronger. This increased faith or confidence enables us to go further in trusting God in all areas, but especially in those trials and tribulations that challenge our faith.
  - b. So the more our faith is tested and the more we pass those tests, the stronger our faith in God's goodness and the longer we remain faithful to God – that is, sin free – in more and more areas of life. This is endurance!

E. Let endurance have its perfect result:

1. The Bible speaks of two perfect results that come from these kinds of times.
2. First, endurance produces a level of Christian perfection or maturity that puts us in the condition – character and virtue wise – where we lack nothing that is necessary for faithfully living a godly life. (Remember I Corinthians 10:13).
3. Second, faithfulness will be rewarded in heaven. In other words, faithfulness now, in the midst of times when it is hard to be faithful, is rewarded by God in eternity (**Matthew 5:11-12**).
4. **II Corinthians 4:17** . . . For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

### III. Conclusion

- A. Practice, not profession, is the test of faith.
- B. The longer we endure, the longer we remain faithful to doing the will of God and obeying the Word of God in that or similar situations. The longer we remain faithful to the will and word of God, the longer we go without willfully sinning in relation to that situation or similar situations. The longer we go between times of willfully sinning, the more we grow in Christian maturity and the more we become complete Christians who are able to withstand temptation – which brings us that much closer to Christian perfection.
- C. May we be people whose hearts long to be as close to Christian perfection as humanly possible in this life.