

James 1:1 – 27

1:1 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. 5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to you. 6 But you must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that one ought not to expect to receive anything from the Lord, 8 being a double-minded person, unstable in all ways. 9 But let the believer of humble circumstances glory in that high position; 10 and the rich glory in being humbled, because like flowering grass the rich will pass away. 11 For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich in the midst of their pursuits will fade away. 12 Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial; for that one, having been approved, will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. 13 Let no one say when tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when carried away and enticed by one's own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. 18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. 19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; 20 for human anger does not achieve the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. 22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 25 But those who look intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abide by it, not having become forgetful hearers but effectual doers, these will be blessed in their doing. 26 If any thinks of themselves as religious, and yet do not bridle their tongue but deceives their own heart, their religion is worthless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Teaching Notes to James 1:1 – 27

THE BIG SHIFT: In this chapter, try to alternative between trying to figure out what the whole chapter is about and trying to apply James in small chunks. In figuring out the whole chapter, the big shift is that James is not just a 'New Testament book of wisdom.' It is not just a random collection of wise sayings. It is a pastoral letter chiefly addressing the social and interpersonal problems between extraordinarily rich and incredibly poor Jewish Christians. James was perhaps writing into a tense situation that was about to explode into a riot. All of James' material actually has to do with reconciling wealthy and impoverished believers.

Comment on the addressees. The twelve tribes of Israel scattered abroad. A diaspora group, probably around the land of Palestine. Jewish Christians. Tell them that we'll get to know them better as we go.

Ask the questions prior to study:

1. James starts by talking about suffering. What kind of suffering might his audience be going through?
2. Why does he suddenly talk about poor and rich in v.9 – 11? What does that have to do with suffering?
3. What kind of temptation might his audience be going through?

Allow the invitational-style discussion to wrestle with these questions. Eventually, suggest The Big Shift. If you find it necessary to present a stronger case, have them read 2:1 – 6 and 5:1 – 6.

Suggest to them in 1:2 – 8 to think about the specific suffering of the poor. Also, in 1:12 – 16, focus on the temptations faced when you're poor.

Other interesting notes

- Notice the parallels in spiritual death and spiritual life. Lust gives birth to sin, sin gives birth to death (v.14 – 17). But God gives birth to us (v.18) by his word of truth, so that we would be a firstfruits.
- So the real remedy to surviving and defeating temptation is to remember who you are in Christ!!! You are a new creation!!! Similar to Romans 6:1 – 11 and 2 Cor.5:17. This is the same idea in v.23 – 25, that if you don't remember who you are, e.g. after you look in the mirror, you're ridiculous!
- The oft-quoted and misquoted v.17: This is in the context of defeating temptation. Temptation is not from God. Only good things are from God.
- Notice the application of all this info about defeating temptation: don't be angry, v.19 – 21.
- What is the 'perfect law, the law of liberty'? The law of Christ as opposed to the Mosaic Law (cf. 1 Cor.9:19 – 22) with its condemnation and bad consequences. Hence we are not 'trying to do enough so that we may live.' But we are also not without standards and ethical requirements. We are 'alive so that we may do' God's will.