

## Once in a Hundred Years

*James 1:1-2*

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for March 15, 2020

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This is an interesting time, to say the least, in American history. In world history, for that matter.

Experts are calling COVID-19 a once-in-a-100 year pandemic. You have to go back to 1918 to find something similar in North Carolina and the rest of the world.

I'm not sure we can even imagine all of the changes this will bring to us as families, employees, students, care-givers and bread-winners. Your schedule has more than likely, dramatically changed and you're asking the Lord for wisdom as you make all kinds of adjustments.

The last time something like this occurred on such a broad scale was back in the Spring of 1918 through early 1919, as the world was still fighting in World War One.

An influenza pandemic ran through North Carolina – and the rest of the country as well.

In April 1919, the North Carolina Secretary of the State Board of Health reported the death of over 13,600 North Carolinians from influenza, and estimated that one million North Carolinians were carrying the disease.

Before it was over, 700,000 Americans had died around the country and more than 50 million lives in total, worldwide.

During the height of the influenza, churches in the Washington D.C. area were banned from meeting. And, from reports I've read, pastors and churches complied in an attempt to slow the spread of the virus.

It's also interesting to note that those same pastors and churches later complained that the government was slow in lifting the ban. Pastors formed

coalitions to petition the government to release their ban and allow churches to meet again. Finally, somewhat reluctantly, the ban was lifted.

So I'm already praying that our state and national leaders will be quick to lift the ban when the time is right.

This pandemic gives us a unique opportunity to do ministry differently and to strengthen areas of ministry that need developing.



**Have you had the opportunity to speak with anyone who is thinking more about eternal matters now? What ministry opportunities can you imagine this pandemic could bring?**

As soon as we are able, our church is forming Sunday Home Groups which gives us some amazing and unique opportunities to not only develop our ministry as a church family to one another, but to be alert to ministry to our community around us.

People around us are going to be thinking more about their future and their security and their hope than they've thought about it in a long time.

During this time, I'll continue to teach God's Word on Sunday morning for as long as I'm able.

Each Sunday I'll take a passage from the Book of James – where faith comes to life. We'll also provide a copy of my manuscript and some discussion questions shortly after my message is complete. When we are able to gather in small groups, our church will enjoy times of prayer and discussion, along with times of fellowship, maybe enjoying a meal together and enjoying the sunshine out in the backyard.

Yes, these are troubling, fearful, painful changes in our world around us . . .

C.S. Lewis wrote that God whispers to us in our pleasures but shouts to us in our pain; pain is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

When disaster strikes, it's the megaphone of God saying “trust Me . . . walk with Me.”

Let me touch on the opening statement of James.

***James a servant of God  
and of the Lord Jesus  
Christ, to the twelve  
tribes in the Dispersion –  
Greetings.***

James is writing to believers who have been dispersed. That word can be translated, “scattered”, like seed that is scattered by the farmer's hand. In fact, the scattering of these Jewish believers

was tantamount to scattering the seeds of the gospel.

Everything had changed for the early church. They were literally scattered. They were forced to leave their homes and run for their lives to other cities and villages.

Imagine throwing whatever you can into boxes and suitcases and then running for your life.

So when you read the words, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, behind those words are volumes of trouble and stress and questions and difficulty.

Well, what should we understand about trouble and trials?

## TROUBLE IS UNAVOIDABLE

James does not write, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, if you encounter various trials,” but “when you do.”

At the very outset of this issue, James is telling us all that we are to expect trouble. Trials are a given. You don’t have to look for problems – they’re gonna find you.

James says, “Count it all joy when you encounter various trials.”

It would make a lot more sense to us if he’d said, “Count it all joy when you escape various trials, right?” That would seem to connect better with the idea of being joyful.



**Do you find it troubling or encouraging that no matter what you do or how you prepare, your life will have trouble? Why do you answer the way you do?**

Joy is certainly the absence of trials, right? If you’re a slave of God and you want to obey your master, the Lord Jesus Christ, surely trials will become a thing of the past.

Jesus Christ said something radically different from that with His own lips when He said: “In this world you will have tribulation.” (John 16:33)

He said to His disciples: “Every day has its share of trouble.” (Matthew 6: 34)

Paul told his converts in Acts 14:22, “We will through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”

In other words, the Christian experience is notably distinctive, not by the absence of trials, but their presence.

We are not God’s sheltered people, we are His scattered people.

## TROUBLE IS UNLIMITED

He says at the end of verse 2 that we will encounter various trials.

The Greek word for various gives us the term polka dot. In other words, the life of Christian will literally be spotted and dotted and speckled and splattered with trials of every conceivable size and shape.

You can translate it, multi-colored. In other words, trials come in all types, packages, shapes and sizes. They might involve your health, your finances, your relationships, your future well-being, your social standing, your job, your past, your hopes unrealized, your children, and on and on and on.



**Is there a part of your life that you think you have completely under control? What would happen to your confidence in God if he stripped you of it?**

Trouble is as varied as the colors of the rainbow.

## TRIALS ARE UNEXPECTED

James writes, “Count it all joy when you encounter various trials.” That word, “encounter” is translated in the King James translation, “fall into.” That’s a wonderful translation and it creates the correct word picture of unexpected suddenness.

It’s a word used only twice more in the entire New Testament; once in Acts 27 where the ship carrying the Apostle Paul unexpectedly encountered a sand bar and began to break apart.

The only other place the word is used is in Luke 10 where the Lord is telling the parable of the man who was traveling to Jericho and he “fell among thieves” – he encountered thieves. (10:30).

Suddenly and without warning, this man is surrounded by trouble and there is no way to escape.

This is the idea of trials here in James 1.



**Does the prospect of sudden and unexpected trouble cause you to live in fear and worry? What are some ideas for how Christians can walk by faith, even in the face of unexpected trials?**

In fact, I find it interesting that the word translated “trials” at the end of this phrase – peirasmos – is linked to peirates which means attacker.

We have taken that particular word – peirates – and transliterated it to create the word, pirate.” That creates an even clearer image of the sudden

appearance of a pirate ship next to yours.

Imagine you're just sailing along, minding your own business when all of a sudden a shadow falls across your deck and you look over and there is a pirate ship. Before you know it they've thrown ropes over and have fastened your ship to theirs.

There you are, unarmed, unprepared, unsuspecting; you are suddenly in the clutches of the Pirates of Tribulation.

Surely James will tell us how to sail away! No, James does not tell us how to escape, he tells us how to respond.

***Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.***

You might be tempted to think of James like I thought of my professor many years ago – he's lost a marble or two.

Or maybe you think – well, he's an apostle. He's supposed to say stuff like that.

Please don't misunderstand what James said. He didn't say that you were going to enjoy your trials. He didn't say we were to feel joyful about trials. He isn't saying that when everything is upside down, you just need to cheer up and smile constantly.

No, James says to consider it all joy.

The word consider is a financial term that can mean to calculate or "to reckon".<sup>1</sup> To total up – to evaluate.



**In what ways are joyfulness and cheerfulness different, and how are they similar?**

Keep in mind that God has a product in mind, which James goes on to describe. We can have joy in spite of the trials because we know God has something in mind for our lives, our ministries and our testimonies.

Here's the basic premise – you don't get to escape your crosses of trial in life; you do not even get to choose your crosses in life. God has designed all of that. However, you do get to choose your responses, in life.

*Victor Frankl, who survived a Nazi concentration camp later wrote from his experiences – "Everything can be taken away from someone but one thing; the last of human freedoms – the freedom to choose your attitude."*

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<sup>1</sup> Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 721

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## Your Turn



You cannot choose your crosses, but you can choose your responses.

You don't choose your crosses, your trials, your challenges, your viruses, your turned-upside-down schedules, but you do choose your responses.

- Respond to the Lord with trust and submission.
- Respond to your dispersed brothers and sisters in Christ by initiating contact, even electronically, as you are able.
- Respond with tangible help and ministry and service to those around you as needs arise. This might be taking someone a meal, taking someone to the doctor, cutting someone's lawn who's sick or a thousand other opportunities as you show your world what faith looks like, and as you introduce them to your Redeemer.

This manuscript is from a message preached on 3/22/2020.

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