

LIV. Traveling Route 66: The Bible in Biblical Perspective
The Journey with Christ, the Promised One
“James—The Book of Wisdom”

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September 22, 2013 – Evening Sermon

We are in the book of James. James 1:1-8 says [1] *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. [2] Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. [5] If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. [6] But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. [7] For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; [8] he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

Here is where the Lord has tested me on my theology. How is that? We started this series on Travelling Route 66 several years ago with the Journey to Christ which were the 39 books of the Old Testament and the Journey with Christ in which we cover the 27 books of the New Testament. When I started this series my purpose was to end the series this past August. I had planned to announce the first Sunday in August when I thought I'd be doing this study that I would be doing an in-depth study on James starting in September but here I am in September still doing the Travelling Route 66 series and doing the in-depth study of James at the same time. A man plans his way and God directs his steps.

So how did all this get messed up? It is very simple. I got prostate cancer and I missed six Sunday nights where I was supposed to be preaching in the Travelling Route 66 series which pushed this series into the fall. Here is where I'm trusting in the providence of God in which He has this for a purpose. The second thing is that some who have heard the James series on Sunday morning will hear a repeat of some things in this study but this study will give me a chance to peel the curtain back a little bit of where we are headed in our in-depth study of James. I will do this by outlining a few themes that are coming up as we go through the 108 verses that make up the book of James.

Then again I am tempted to do what Peter says, “For me to repeat these things are of no bother to me.” One of the great challenges of preaching and teaching is to try to repeat because people learn by repetition but they don't want to hear repetition so you have to learn to repeat with nobody thinking that you've just repeated. Perhaps even further I could say I think it could be substantiated even though I haven't done an examination or scientific study, but that James could be the most quoted book in the New Testament.

As we work our way through James you'll recognize so many things like; ‘the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,’ ‘don't be just a hearer of the Word who deludes yourself but be a doer of the Word,’ ‘no man can tame the tongue,’ for there is passage after passage after passage that we tend to quote. The reason we do this is because James is a wisdom book. It is the New Testament counterpart of the Old Testament books of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes. I like to look at James where Job is

the narrative of a man who perseveres in suffering with amazing transparency, grows in his suffering and on the other side of his suffering has grown in his wisdom. This is displayed in the book of Job. James gives you the outline of what is happening in the life of Job. Job is the biography and James is the position paper on the wisdom of God and how to live in this life. So let's get started.

Who wrote James? James, the brother of Jesus is the author of this book. James has four brothers and one of his other brothers whose name is Jude wrote the book of Jude. When Jude identifies himself in his book he will introduce himself as a brother of James. There are actually four James' mentioned in the Bible. There is James the son of Alphaeus who has to be identified as someone's son. Another James is James the father of Judas, not Iscariot. So that is a man who has to be identified as a father and related to the one who is not Iscariot. Then there is James the brother of John who are both cousins to Jesus because their mother Salome is the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as referenced in John 19:25. James the brother of John is killed in Acts 12 so the writer of this book is likely not that James.

This James is a James that doesn't likely need any extra identification. James is all he needs. He is a one name guy that everyone knows who says his name. He identifies himself as a bond slave of Jesus Christ. He doesn't even claim his familial relationship. It is also noteworthy that James calls Him the Lord Jesus Christ, affirming His Deity and this is his brother. Whenever people write scandalous things about other people it is almost always someone from their family that does it. Here is someone who not only came from the same womb as Jesus but grew up in the same house as Jesus and played in the same yard as Jesus. They worked with the same father and he had no problem affirming that not only Christ is the Son of God in His Deity but also affirming that he has surrendered to Him as a bond slave.

Something dramatic has happened because this James who is the author of this epistle is the James who did not believe in Jesus according to John 7:5. He also arrogantly mocked Jesus. They would interrupt Jesus when He was teaching and preaching. Yet this James and his brothers are converted and you find them in Acts 1 with the 120 in prayer before the outburst of the Gospel with 3,000 saved in Acts 2. What has happened is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and these unbelieving brothers have become believers, but James is one who Jesus appears to after His resurrection. It has been debated how many appearances Jesus gave after His resurrection but three of them were to individuals and this James is one of the individuals. Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, Peter and James according to I Corinthians 15:7.

It is this James that writes this wisdom book, but unlike the wisdom books of the Old Testament this wisdom book is calling on the material from the preaching of Jesus. He has almost 30 quotations from the sermons of Jesus. He loves to use the book of Proverbs and alludes to or quotes from Proverbs multiple times. He loves to use parables which he would have picked up from Jesus. He uses 13 of them in this book. He loves to take on the tough subjects even as his brother did that He would teach and preach in the sermons that are recorded for us in the Gospel. So this is James the author.

When was this book written and where was it written from? First it seems as if this was written from Jerusalem. That would be appropriate for when the persecution came James was not scattered like many were for he was still in Jerusalem. He was one of the four pillars of the church who were James the brother of Jesus, Peter, John and

later Paul. He was the pastor at the church at Jerusalem. That was considered a mega church with 3,000 then 5,000 and that was just counting the men and people were being saved every day. So he is writing from where he is the pastor. In fact, when the church has its first general assembly in Acts 15 he is the man chosen as the moderator. Just think there could have been many others who would have been chosen as moderator like Paul, Barnabas, John and others yet they chose James.

He must have been an astounding man. He is actually called in history James the Just. Religious historians said he would regularly every day go to the temple and kneel in prayer in the courtyard. He would spend countless hours there in prayer on his knees praying for the work of the Gospel so much so that his knees were calloused and looked like those of a camel's knees. He would be cast off the pinnacle of the temple in 62 AD there at Jerusalem. It was the same pinnacle where Jesus had been tempted from. When I have taken people to Israel we come to the street that was uncovered for in 66 AD when Jerusalem and the temple mount were destroyed in fulfillment of prophecy from Jesus, one of the stones on the street is the pinnacle of the temple stone.

This is where James was when they called for him to recant and he said "How can I deny the risen, ascended Savior who is coming again" and they threw him down from that temple to the pavement street below. So four years later that pinnacle was thrown down to the street in 66 AD. It is recorded that the fall didn't kill James and with his mangled body he twisted over to his knees and began to pray for those who were persecuting him, even as they beat him to death with a fuller's bat. It was at that place James wrote this book with five chapters and 108 verses.

When did this book get written? He obviously had to write it before 62 AD when he was killed and it seems as if he had written it before the general assembly of the church which was likely took place sometime between 47 and 49 AD. If it had been written after that some of those issues most likely would have made their way into the body of this letter but the issues they addressed at the general assembly that is recorded in Acts 15 do not make their way into this epistle. So likely he wrote it before then and the most obvious dates would be 42 to 48 AD. That means you are looking at the very first book written in the New Testament. That is about fifteen years after the resurrection of Jesus and the conversion of James and about fifteen years prior to his death. He has about a thirty year ministry from his conversion until his death and this is written about half way in between that.

I want to take a minute to encourage parents. I know the Holy Spirit is inspiring James who is quoting the Proverbs and the Psalms. He is bringing up the lessons he heard from Jesus while he was an unbeliever. Yet there is such a command of the Old Testament and the sermons of Jesus. What does that tell you? It tells you that a lot of times while you are doing teaching, preaching and family worship and taking your kids to church and you think it's not doing anything, actually it is. Once they are converted it just starts exploding out of their life so don't despair in those days when it seems as if they are totally disinterested. You would be amazed at what is actually finding root, roost and nest in their hearts, as it must have with James who writes with clarity, passion and knowledge that he had gained throughout the years. He was raised in a family that went once maybe twice a year to Jerusalem for the Feast. His family was regularly in the synagogues that is recorded in Luke 2 about the life of Jesus and this would have been true about His brothers as well.

Why is this book written? The purpose statement for the book of James is to delineate the Gospel life of persistent ministry and joyful maturation in a sin-cursed world informed by wisdom from above. That is the basic declaration. He is taking those who have professed to be believers and keeps calling them time and time again in the epistle, “my brothers, my beloved brothers, I will take you upon your profession of faith, now if the benefits of the cross have claimed you then the demands of the crown will be your delight, even in the difficulties of this world.” He puts 48 commandments in the book of James to direct the professing believer into how live for Christ who is your Lord and King.

In so doing, he acknowledges that you are in a broken world. There is gossip, slander, favor, prejudice, persecution and brokenness. You are in a broken, sin-cursed world but in the midst of that all that sin produces in this world actually does two things – one, it gives you a platform for persistent ministry and steadfastness that is inexplicable except for God’s grace. Secondly, the very events that you’re persisting in ministry are events that are continuing to grow you as you consider it all joy growing in the wisdom of God in a broken world.

Having said that, here is an outline of the book of James. This is kind of a different outline than any that I’ve done. The outline has three points. James the author is found in James 1:1a. The audience is the twelve tribes of the Dispersion which were the Jewish Christians who were either at Jerusalem and scattered after the persecution or have been evangelized as the Gospel has gone to the synagogues of the dispersed people throughout the world but at the same time because of the New Testament people the church is called the true children of Abraham. The church is called those circumcised of the heart and it is also ultimately given to all believers, this Gospel wisdom. That is found in James 1:1b. Thirdly, is the address which involves Gospel wisdom and the Gospel life which is found in James 1:2 to 5:20.

You’re probably thinking that was a short outline for the book of James. I believe the outline is showing you display and develop Gospel wisdom in a Gospel life in numerous situation. Gospel wisdom and the Gospel life is displayed by adversity and prayer in James 1:2-18. Then it is by hearing and doing the Word in James 1:19-27. Then it is by avoiding partiality and formalism in James 2:1-13. Then we see by faith and obedience in James 2:14-26. Then we see by taming and controlling the tongue in James 3:1-12. By differentiating by Divine wisdom from above and Satanic wisdom from beneath (from the earth) which is found in James 3:13-18 to James 4:1-10. By hating gossip and slander which is found in James 4:11-12 and by avoiding pride and presumption in James 4:13-17. Then there is warning the rich in James 5:1-6 and by patience and perseverance in James 5:7-12. Then by prayer, praise and worship found in James 5:13-18 and by shepherding in James 5:19-20. So I believe that outline actually unfolds the Gospel life and Gospel wisdom in the brokenness of this world.

What are the themes in the book of James? I want to outline five of them for you. Here is the first theme. The trials of life are designed by God as a gift of His grace, to both prove your faith and improve your Gospel life. In your life for Christ what is on the one hand the most difficult battle of sanctification which is pursuing holiness in your life and on the other hand every time you win that battle it actually advances everything else in your Christian life of sanctification? Let’s look in James 3.

James 3:1 says *[1] Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.* That is not the judgment of salvation. That is the judgment that comes of believers and how they have used their gifts that is spoken of in the Bible. In other words, I as an ordained pastor/teacher or those teaching small groups in Sunday school, whenever you take a position of teaching you have just put yourself at a point of stricter judgment. Why? It is because teaching like leadership works. When all is said and done the pupil becomes like their teacher. So if you are teaching you are affecting the lives of people. That's why it is an awesome thing to be placed in the charge of teaching and preaching. That's why the Bible tells us to test those who would teach, not only in their understanding of the content but also of their life. How are they applying that content in their life?

This makes me so grateful for the work of grace, knowing my frailties in teaching. I'm so glad my salvation doesn't depend on this. I understand the sovereignty of God's rule can overcome stupid, inept and error ridden teachers but humanly speaking God uses the teaching of His Word to bring people to Himself. Is my teaching an asset to win the lost and equip the believer or is it a liability because of its inadequacies, laziness, or error? Those are questions that are constantly before someone who is teaching and preaching, certainly the ordained offices and it extends to Sunday schools and everywhere. I am not doing this to frighten you away from teaching. I'm trying to simply get you to see the sacredness of it. Now let me give you the flip side of it.

Why would the Lord bring the warning that when those who teach, teach using their tongue that they have a stricter judgment in terms of the believer's judgments of how they use their gifts? Why would He warn them of that if it wasn't a privileged position that had much potential? So if God has gifted you and called you as a teacher then go for it but go for it in utter humble reliance upon the Spirit of God and an utter devotion to fan the flame and stir up the gift. The Bible says in I Timothy 5:17 *[17] Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.*

So in James 3 he is warning us about the tongue and first of all goes to the office of the tongue which is the teacher to warn us about the stricter judgment and then he goes on in James 3:2-12, *[2] For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. [3] If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. [4] Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. [5] So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! [6] And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. [7] For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, [8] but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. [9] With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. [10] From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. [11] Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? [12] Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.*

So what is he saying here? First off he starts with the positive unlike how most of the Scripture writers do and then he goes to the negative. Basically he says if the tongue can be tamed by the grace of God in your life then everything else in the Christian life is a piece of cake. It is like a rudder directing the ship. Look at the tonnage in this ship and yet a pilot is directing it with a small rudder. If the tongue gets on track then it takes everything else in life but then he goes to the negative. If it spouts forth sin then it blemishes, stains, and pollutes the entire life of the one who is speaking with that tongue. It sends us into so many sins. That old saying goes 'Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive', well once you start deceiving how many other lies have to be told and other things that have to be said.

Then he says that the tongue is actually doing the work of the heart. He is alluding to what Christ said when He said "A man speaks from what fills his heart." You can't control the tongue until you get the heart under the grace of God and when the heart comes under the grace of God it will show up in how the tongue is used in the mouth of a believer. Therefore you want to fill your heart with the fresh water that would come forth with a fountain through the tongue and not the poisonous water that would poison the lives of many. Here we are in a broken world with an old man inside of me, a world outside of me and one of the places where I first prove, improve and grow in my Gospel life is in my tongue.

A second theme from the book of James is a Gospel life view or as James calls it 'wisdom from above' is crucial for a Gospel life style. That's why he says if any lacks wisdom let him ask of God. James 3:13-18 says *[13] Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. [14] But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. [15] This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. [16] For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. [17] But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. [18] And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.* In other words, the Gospel life that produces the blessed effects in the lives of believers and other believers comes from a Gospel life view, wisdom from above.

A third theme from the book of James is the Word of God is to be both heard and obeyed. James 1:19-21 says *[19] Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; [20] for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. [21] Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.* He wants you to be quick to hear so that you can learn and slow to speak so that you can learn. At some point I'd like to write down all the things my dad told me and I thought 'man, that was smart.' One thing he told me that helps me as a pastor was when he said "I don't care how flat the pancake is it has two sides." Another thing he told me was "Son, there is one way to know you're not learning in life and that's when you're talking." I have an occupational hazard here because on the one hand I have to learn to talk but when I talk I quit learning. Be quick to hear which means you have to stop talking. Be slow to speak and my anger will not achieve the righteousness that honors the Lord. So receive the Word.

When someone is converted the first thing I look for is whether it is a genuine conversion or is it another Simon the magician? I believe one of the greatest evidences of someone's conversion and in fact it may be the paramount evidence of one's conversion is the hunger for God's Word to be read and preached, to be read and heard, to be received. Peter puts it this way; you become like a nursing babe that longs for the pure milk of the Word (I Peter 2:2). Do you have to say to a new baby "Listen you have to eat"? Just get them near the milk and you'll see what happens. Do you have to teach a new born to suck to get the milk? No, you don't have to do that. They know how to get it and they want it. All you have to do is make sure they get the pure milk, the right thing. They get hungry.

In fact, that is one of my concerns for new believers is that they get so hungry they start getting adulterated milk sometimes, because they don't have the discernment at times. But they want to receive the Word. So now that you are receiving the Word let's look at what he says next. So you have received the Word which is able to save your souls.

Now James 1:22-25 says *[22] But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. [23] For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. [24] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. [25] But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.*

Now he has put it together. The converted man is a man who is hungry for and takes in the Word of God by reading and preaching as it is planted in his soul. If he is a converted man he is a hearer of the Word and desires to be and pursues being a doer of the Word. That becomes, not the reason for his salvation, but the evidence of his salvation. So he is not a hearer only, but also a doer of the Word of God.

A fourth theme from the book of James is the Gospel life is demonstrated by a servant's heart and life. James 4:1-10 says *[1] What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? [2] You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. [3] You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. [4] You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. [5] Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? [6] But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." [7] Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. [8] Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. [9] Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. [10] Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*

Don't exalt yourself and pray for humility, humble yourself and let Him exalt you at the right time. I don't say that to say you can't pray for humility for you can pray for it all you want but then duck. It's amazing to see the answer to that prayer. Just go ahead and humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and He will exalt you at the right time. What happens when someone says 'no' to self-exaltation, self-absorption and

warring within themselves? The grace of God lays hold of them, then the devil flees, they humble themselves and then this is what happens in the next part of James.

James 4:11-12 says [11] *Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.*

[12] *There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?* So instead of assuming God's place to make a judgment on your neighbor but that doesn't mean you don't make a judgment about behavior, but you don't know their heart. So instead of assuming that place you do assume the place of ministry to your neighbor, to love your neighbor so that the Gospel life begins to be demonstrated, not by a self-exalting heart and life but by a self-denying heart and life and a servant's heart or life.

The fifth theme in the book of James is saving faith is authenticated by obedience. Let's look at James 2. This is the wonderful controversial section. This is the part of James that caused Martin Luther to get acid reflux. James 2:14-17 says [14] *What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?* (The question is what is saving faith? The question isn't 'does he have faith' for everybody has faith for the devil believes. How do you know when someone has saving faith?) [15] *If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,* [16] *and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?* [17] *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* In other words, what justifies faith? It is not what justifies the sinner. It is what justifies saving faith and that is works. Your works don't justify you. Your works justify your profession of saving faith. Let's continue.

James 2:18-26 says [18] *But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.* [19] *You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!* [20] *Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?* [21] *Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?* [22] *You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works;* [23] *and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God.* [24] *You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.* [25] *And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?* [26] *For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.*

James is not in opposition to Paul here. He knows you are saved by faith in Christ. Your works don't make you right and he even quotes Genesis 15:6, *"Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"* but the question is, how do you know Abraham had saving faith? When the test came he gave up Isaac and giving up Isaac was not saving him but giving up Isaac justified his claim to faith. It was faith in the promises of God that justified him with the gift of a perfect righteousness. So how do you know he had a saving faith? Basically he is not saying faith plus works saves you and he is not saying that works saves you. He is saying that saving faith works.

You are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone but grace and faith are never alone. They are always demonstrated. Grace brings the overcoming of

sin. Where sin abounds grace does much more abound (Romans 5:20). Faith is demonstrated. When someone is a believer it's not that they can just answer the right doctrinal question. Yes there is one God who dwells in Three Persons. Satan passed that test. Jesus died on the cross. Saving faith surrenders mind, heart and will. So while there is not a perfect life there are the evidences of salvation by faith, because saving faith works. Saving faith is not the act of a moment. It is the acquisition of a life lived for Christ. We are saved by faith and then we live by faith, not with perfection but with a changed life that evidences saving faith in Christ.

I am reminded of this in my ministry and one of the things that I have always appreciated are the times when I've heard Dr. Barker do a funeral service. More times than not he'll use this illustration of the people that stand before the Lord who are trusting in their works or people who will stand before the Lord who are trusting in their works plus their faith, instead of those who are trusting by faith alone in Christ and then he makes this point – when you do you're surrendered to the Lord and when you have surrendered, your life will manifest who the Master is that you obey. It is the One who you trust for salvation and for eternity. It is not faith plus works. It is saving faith in Christ works out of love to Christ because of His work that has saved us to take us to glory. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for this wonderful letter, wisdom book that we're going to be walking through step by step for the next couple of months. Thank You for allowing us to pick out some of those themes and put our arms around this book and anticipate from the simplicity of an overview to the depth of our study. Father, keep us faithful to it and keep us growing in grace and living by faith with a life that makes evident to the world that we have trusted in Christ alone as Lord and Savior, in Jesus' Name, Amen.