

The Epistle of James

Meeting 1

Introduction

The Epistle of James is very precious. In the past, many have said that they do not like this epistle. Yet the Epistle of James is so practical; without it, it is impossible for us to gain access to the wonderful writings and teachings of Paul and the other apostles. We may know and have read and heard about many teachings in the past years, and we may believe in God and have faith in God; but as James says, if we are only hearers, and do not have the outworking of the faith, and are not doers of the word, then faith is dead. So, we must ask ourselves: How much of what we have heard and learned have we lived out and practiced in our daily living and in the church life? Is there peace and the true oneness in the church life, or do we fight one another when the trials come? Do we really love the church of the Lord, or are we just going to the meetings week after week but have no reality in our daily living? What does our practical personal life and family life look like? We are expecting the Lord's return and want to be prepared for it, but what does that look like in reality and practically in our daily living? This is why we need the epistle of James. We must all have the reality, especially today at the end of this age. It is very practical and is a great help to us because it makes us come under the light and exposes us. For this reason, at this time, the Lord gave us the burden to have fellowship about the epistle of James. Our hearts must be open to Him. May the

Lord truly speak to us in a very practical way so that He will touch our hearts and renew us.

“James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...”

(Jam. 1:1a)

James began by calling himself of a bondservant (Gk. <δοῦλος> “doulos”) of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (not an apostle, as Paul and Peter often did, though they also said that they were bondservants of the Lord Jesus Christ.) Would you prefer the title of an apostle or a bondservant? Which is the greater title? We would probably prefer the greater title. But at the time when James wrote the epistle, everyone knew that James and Jude were the half-brothers of Jesus according to the flesh. If we were James, we would have capitalized on that and said, “I’m a brother of Jesus! Don’t you know – I grew up with Jesus!” But James did not use that; instead, he not only wrote that he was a bondservant of God but also a bondservant of the Lord Jesus Christ. For him to write that means something! This should show us that in the church life we are all bondservants. We should not use any kind of relationship to get recognition or a special position in the church. In the church if something happens in your family – do you stand with the Lord or with your relatives? If you recognized James as a brother or relative of Jesus, he would tell you, “Jesus Christ is the Son of God! He is the Lord! I am His bondservant.”

In our language today, the word “bondservant” is not used; nobody wants to be a slave. This term is not in our thoughts. We are always proud and want to be respected; just as in today’s world, people want to climb the corporate ladder and be well respected. We all want to serve God. Maybe we want to serve as an elder; and even if we are not, we may still behave as an elder or an elderess; but this always causes a big mess in the church.

The word “bondservant” right at the beginning of this epistle should already touch our hearts and expose us. It is written that we are all bondservants. In Isaiah, even the Lord was referred to as “My Servant” (Is. 42:1). The Lord Himself said that *“the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve”* (Matt. 20:28a). In the house of the Lord, are we bondservants, or do we want to be served? Especially the leading ones in the church must be a pattern to the believers as bondservants and not to be served. To be served means that you are higher than everyone else. To be a bondservant means you are lower than everyone else. In Philippians 2:7, we see that the Lord not only lowered Himself to come in the likeness of man, but He also came lower than a man taking the form of a slave, a bondservant. Paul said, *“let each esteem others better than himself”* (Phil. 2:3b). Woe if a slave considers himself to be better or higher than another slave. If we all have the consciousness and reality of being bondservants, esteeming others better than ourselves, then we will have few problems in the Lord’s house.

A bondservant is always looking at his master to see what he should do. He does what the master says and cannot do what he himself wants to do. A brother recently said that at work he did something that he thought was really good and wonderful. But when he showed his boss, his boss said, “Yes, it’s good, but that is not what we need.” If we do something before God that He did not tell us to do, we commit the sin of presumptuousness (Ps. 19:13). If a bondservant insists that he did the right thing, *“Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name...”* (Matt. 7:22), then the Lord will say, *“I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”* (Matt. 7:23). And even if we think we did it so well, then the Lord will tell us, “Who told you that you should do that? What is it good for? You did it out of presumptuousness and your good intentions.” How

often do we do something that we think is good for the church? We think a certain thing is wrong, and another thing is right. If we do something for God out of our self and our flesh, it always has a harmful effect. In the end it will not help build up the church nor will it supply Christ. If it is my opinion that come out of my mouth, as James said, that will kindle a fire, and will burn up half of the house. We must repent! Don't always insist that you are right. Only if the Lord is expressed through us and life flows out of us, then that will help and build up the church. This is why we must all have the consciousness of being bondservants in the house of the Lord! You may be the boss in your house or business, but you are not the king in Zion – the Lord is the King! We all must come to Him and honor and fear Him and serve Him acceptably (Heb. 12:28). To serve God acceptably is a stronger word than to be well-pleasing to Him because when God judges He will not just say, "I don't like that" but "I don't accept that." God will not accept everything we do for Him.

The word "bondservant" is important. Let it be written into your heart and into your being. Always remember that in the house of the Lord we are bondservants. With respect to our service and everything we do, we are bondservants. So, if the Lord tells us, "Don't do that!" we won't do it. Do not be presumptuous. Do not be so quick to react to something. That is why James says we should be swift to hear and slow to speak and slow to wrath (Jam. 1:19). Unfortunately, we do the opposite! We are swift to speak, but very slow to hear. We are hard of hearing, but our tongue is so fast. Especially if we see something that we don't like, when the Lord say, "Stop!" we cannot help it, and the words explode out of us like a volcano. We say, "Lord, Lord," but we do not do His will. We only do what we want; then why do we still call Him "Lord"? Do we conduct ourselves in the Lord's house as a little lord or a lady, or do we do what the Lord tells us to do? Do we come to the Lord in all things, or do we decide things on our own

and insist on being right? If that is the case, then who is the lord over the Lord's house? That is why, if we don't have the reality of being bondservant of our Lord Jesus Christ, the church life will not work although we may know much. So, knowledge itself without the reality will make us proud: *"Knowledge puffs up"* (1 Cor. 8:1b) – it is better to know nothing.

It is good for us all to always have such a feeling and consciousness in our hearts that we are bondservants in the Lord's house. We cannot forget that we have different standings before God. On the one hand, we are the bride and the members of His body; on the other hand, we are bondservants. Praise the Lord! This aspect is very important! The Lord is my witness, I tell Him very often, "Lord, I am nothing. I can do nothing. I am not even worthy to receive a reward from you. I am happy if I can partake in the coming kingdom. Whether it is with a reward or not, I am unworthy." Luke 17:10 says, *"...when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'"* Is that how we are in the church? Would an unprofitable servant have so many opinions of his fellow servants? We must ask ourselves what the condition of the church is now. Today, in the house of the Lord, if there is any criticism, we are easily upset and offended. If something happens in the church, everyone has their opinion; and with our opinions, we destroy the church. These things will happen over and over again if we do not learn to be bondservants of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why we need the epistle of James. So it is important to touch this point that we are bondservants in our fellowship; otherwise, the words of the epistle James will not be able to penetrate our hearts.

“...to the 12 tribes which are scattered abroad” (Jam. 1:1b)

When James wrote the epistle and in the Book of Acts, we see that the Hebrew Christians were scattered among the nations because of persecution from their fellow Jews in Judaism. Today we Christians are so scattered because of fighting, different opinions, vying for positions, and everyone doing whatever he wants, causing even more splits and divisions. Today, we are not experiencing the persecution as they did, but there may be persecution among ourselves. Are you persecuting the saints in the church? Are you persecuting your husband or your wife? You think you're just having a little fight; but no, it's persecution. We must love the saints, but that does not mean that we tolerate everything. Remember, we are standing on the Lord's side – not on the side of the relatives, nor siding with one person but not the other. Otherwise, there is persecution. James did not write, “James, an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ to all the Christians in the divisions.” The tone of that sentence sounds different from what James wrote. Even if you wanted to have fellowship with all the Christians, they surely will not receive your word, especially if they are in different divisions – they will throw you out.

James wrote: *“to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.”* He had a heart for those who were scattered. Today, the Lord wants to teach us to have a heart for all the believers who are ready to receive the truth, and to speak to them about God's word when the opportunity arises. The word that the Lord has given to us is not just for ourselves but for all Christians, for all who are willing to receive it. Many are preaching the gospel – that is good. They are serving the Lord and must stand or fall before Him. We should let others do what they want – we don't have to judge or scold them or touch their work. That does not mean that we agree with everything they do; but we are bondservants of the Lord, who are we to judge them? We are not the Lord or the

Judge. If we can carry out faithfully what the Lord has entrusted us to do, then we can be happy. This was also Paul's attitude. He did not want to touch the church in Jerusalem because that was not the measure nor the realm, in which the Lord had placed him to serve as a bondservant and as a priest. We must also learn to leave everything to the Lord. He is the Judge. Let the Lord judge them, just as He must also judge us. Remember we must stand on the Lord's side. To stand on the Lord's side of the truth and the word of God is always right. Sometimes it may sound harsh, but the Lord's side is always correct. I hope that we will not be scattered through persecution by our behavior and how we conduct ourselves.

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials”
(James 1:2)

We need many trials in our spiritual life, just as we have gone through the many trials in our human life – beginning with childhood, in school from kindergarten through university, in the family, at work, and in the marriage. We do not always pass every test, nor do we have joy in our trials. And when we fail tests, we have to repeat them until we make it. We cannot just run away from the trials. At the university, you don't run away or change your major every time you fail a test. You must persevere because there is no other way. How is it when we go through spiritual trials or experience persecution? Do we run away? It is a joy for me to see that my dear brother in the Lord who is as old as me has not run away but has persevered and is still here! I have learned through all the past experiences to have joy in the trials. When some brothers experienced being kicked out for the Lord's sake, I told them to rejoice! Should we weep and lament when we are persecuted? No! The Lord told us to rejoice when we are persecuted (Matt. 5:11-12)! Have you seen people rejoice when they are being persecuted? No, usually we are never joyful going

through the trials; only after we pass the test, we are happy that we made it through. But the Lord told us to rejoice! If we have eyes to see and understand why the Lord is allowing the trials and is bringing us through the trials, we will change our attitude and rejoice. Especially in our Christian life, if we are going through a trial right now, it is because the Lord has found us worthy go through it at this time; and He wants us to count it all joy when we go through the various trials.

Peter and Paul said the same thing, that we must rejoice though we are going through various trials, as our faith must be tested by fire so that it will be more precious than gold (1 Pet. 1:6-7; Heb. 12:1-2). But somehow, even though we have read the verses in 1 Peter so often, when the trials come, we completely forget about them as if we've never read them before! It seems we are never joyful in trials. Our first reaction is to grumble and complain, "What?! Why is this happening to me?" We do not say, "Praise the Lord, You have brought me this far! I have to go through this trial! Thank You, Lord, for this wonderful, new opportunity to gain You!" If this is our attitude when a situation or trial arises in the church, then we will not grumble and complain. We all must learn to count it all joy when we go through various trials.

What does it mean to "count it all joy"? How you go through a trial depends on how you approach the trial. To "count it all joy" means that you should count it joy when you fall into a trial. When a trial comes your way, your attitude is very important. If you react in your flesh and self, then the trial will become something not good. But if your attitude is to be in the spirit and before the Lord and you see, "Lord, this is a wonderful opportunity to gain You!" then you can do what the Lord tells you to do and count it all joy in the trial. This word is important and very practical.

The more we grow in our spiritual life, the more difficult the trials will become. As with Abraham, in the beginning the trials that God allowed for him were easier. But Abraham grew in his faith through all his trials and experiences with God. And when God tested Abraham's faith by asking him to offer up Isaac, his only begotten son, on the altar, that was a PHD level test of his faith! How did Abraham react? "No, Lord, that can't be! You're joking, right?" Maybe he thought that God must have made a mistake! But no, that was not his reaction. He was not joyfully saying, "Halleluja!" but he did not complain. Immediately, without any negative attitude, he went and did it. He prepared everything because he believed God. God never told Abraham at any time, "Go and offer Isaac; and I will raise him up from the dead," nor had Abraham ever seen anyone raised from the dead. There was no such teaching at that time. (Of course, today, we know about the resurrection of Jesus Christ; but at that time, he did not know that.) How did he receive such a concept and revelation? Because he had such a close relationship with God and had gone through so many trials from one level to higher level and another until he had arrived to this very point. He knew that the only possibility why God would demand this of him is because when Isaac died, God would raise him up from the dead because God's promise and plan would be fulfilled: that through Isaac, Abraham's descendants would be as many as the stars of the sky, as the sand of the sea!

This example shows us that it is through the trials, when we experience this wonderful God in fulfilling His word and plan and purpose, that we will know God and receive revelation from Him. That is why we should not hold back or run away from trials; but we should go through it and know God more and know what He is doing instead of grumbling and scolding and insisting on our opinion and criticism of the situation. We all must repent. The trials should bring us forward and give us revelation so that we

would know this God more. Then as we go through the trial, we will be like Abraham who through the offering up of Isaac suddenly realized that God is One who raises from the dead! Such a wonderful revelation! If Abraham had told anyone else the revelation he received, they would have thought that he had lost his mind. But Abraham received the wonderful revelation! So, God wants to take us onward through all the many trials! You have landed where you are today because you have gone through the trials! The trials show that you have learned much. Now you can go on to the next one. Without trials we cannot go on spiritually! In the past we have had one trial after another, and in the beginning we may have cried and murmured. But if we look back today, are we not thankful that we went through those spiritual trials? We have learned so much through the trials.

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials.” You don’t have to pray for trials because you will fall into them. That means you don’t have a say or decision in whether a trial comes or not. There are many things I did not expect, but suddenly I fell into them. That’s why when you fall into a trial do not complain, “Why, why, did I fall into that?” and try to explain and rationalize, “Is it my fault? Did I do something wrong?” Count it all joy! Rejoice and say, “Lord, thank You for this trial.” God arranged it for you. He decided that you were ready for this trial. As it is written, God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to take (1 Cor. 10:13). God knows exactly what kind of trial you need. You cannot give a university exam to a fifth grader; he will surely fail. But every trial that you fall into is exactly perfect for you. It is unexpected; but that is good, so that you will learn something new from God. So, count it all joy, my brethren, when we fall into various trials!

There are so many kinds of trials. In His wisdom, God allows all kinds of various trials to happen to us because our spiritual

growth has many sides. Our growth does not just consist of good experiences and receiving wonderful revelation; because when the trial comes, that revelation won't help you. We need the trials. It is through the trials that we know where we stand and whether we have learned something or not. Otherwise, when you just have so much knowledge in your head, you think, "O yeah, I have come so far!" But if you fail in a trial, then you know, "Lord, I haven't gotten that far yet." The knowledge itself will deceive you; and you deceive yourselves if you think you know it. Then the trial will show you that you know nothing of what you must and should know. If we are preparing ourselves for the coming of the Lord, then we should expect more trials. Do you think that this plandemic was just a trial for the world, or was it also a trial for us? Our flesh and our soul life does not differ from that of other people. The trial is there to see if you trust in the Lord and for you to understand what it all means. Have you asked yourself, "What does this all mean? Through this trial of the plandemic, what have I learned? What have I gained? What does this have to do with the Lord's return? What does the Lord want me to learn? Lord, what do You want to speak to me?" Or do you just think that it all has nothing to do with you? All things are a trial! Do you think that the persecution and scattering at the time of James had nothing to do with them and that it didn't matter? No, the Lord uses everything. We are living in this world, and the enemy is using everything to pull us down and to even destroy us and influence us. All things influence us. So, we need all these various trials.

"knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience"
(James 1:3)

Our patience is so short – maybe we only have five minutes of patience. We have no endurance. This is the wisdom of Thomas Jefferson: "When angry count ten before you speak, if you are

very angry, count one hundred.” That is a good counsel if you are about to lose your patience – but without the Lord’s life, counting to 100 will not be enough; it might work for a little while, but I don’t think so. We have the Holy Spirit who dwells in us and works in us and works patience in us. That means He puts the brakes on our flesh and our self. Go to your Lord! Go to your Master and ask Him, “Lord, what should I do?” Speak to Him! If you just count from 1 to 10, you are not speaking to anyone but to yourself. But if you turn to the Lord and speak to Him, and let Him speak to you, then the Holy Spirit will lead you and will work patience in you. 2 Peter 1 tells us that we must add patience to our faith. We have no patience – we explode like a volcano right away, which in the end never produces anything good. What James wrote, *“knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience”* is as what it says in Romans 5:3 that *“tribulation produces perseverance.”* We need patience.

***“But let patience have its perfect work,
that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing”***
(James 1:4)

Do not quit prematurely in the middle of a trial. If you do, then patience will say, “Wait! I’m not done yet. I still have to work on you. Don’t run away!” Don’t stop before His work is done; especially at this point, where God is trying to teach us a lesson. If you do stop prematurely, then you won’t gain anything because the work is not yet finished; and you will have to start again and repeat the lesson. Then the work at this trial is not perfect and you cannot go to a higher level. Patience is important. Let the Holy Spirit, through patience have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Patience is a virtue that we have by the Holy Spirit and by faith. It is a very important part of God’s nature. God has great patience,

longsuffering. How long is longsuffering? How patient is God with you? He is so patient, you cannot even measure it; His patience is infinite! There is no measure to God's patience and long suffering. In contrast, in our natural life, our patience is very short; sometimes, depending on the situation and trial, it is even less than seconds! It depends on what the trial and the situation is. This is how it is. Let patience have its perfect work, that we all may be perfect and complete, from trial to trial, lacking nothing. Especially at this point, whatever the trial is working out in our spiritual life, if we fail, then the Lord will tell us, "Do it again. At the next opportunity, you have to repeat it."

Praise the Lord, this is an introduction to James! May the Lord bless us all through this wonderful book of James!

Note: The above content has not been reviewed by the speaker.