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LESSON NOTES

JUST "DO IT!" ✨ A STUDY OF JAMES

Rationale & Background

Digging Deeper D. Thomas Porter

WHY STUDY JAMES

Westerners presume the intellect is the supreme regulator. If the mind is clear, then our behavior will be clear. If the intellect rules, then we rule reality. James, the half-brother of Jesus of Nazareth challenges this premise—he argues: What one does... tells us more about a person than what they think. James was probably from Missouri.

AN OVERVIEW OF JAMES—THE CHALLENGE FOR INTELLECTUAL BELIEVERS

Studies in James requires us to consider how the Lord God tempers our temper, refines our refuse, and ridicules our riches.

James challenges believers to be more than thinkers of the Word; we are to be doers as well. He makes our

lives appropriately more difficult. We are, according to James, to count it all joy when persecuted, ask God without doubting, to accept our own desires¹ as **our** problem (rather than blaming God or Satan). We are to be quick to hear, and slow to speak. We are not to get angry easily; take care of widows and orphans, and to keep ourselves clean from the world's toxicity. Most importantly, we are not permitted only to be Christian thinkers and feelers—we are to be doers. James is not easy.

The music man conned Iowans to buy instruments to accomplish his unique music pedagogy, "think music." When we just *think* music, we don't do music, and more importantly, we delude others and ourselves. We can fool others by our articulated thought and feelings, and we may think we can fool the Lord God Jehovah, but James warns us—don't fool yourselves into thinking that "good thoughts" about God without "good actions" is any more than that—"good thoughts."

You will be intrigued by the forthright nature of James—he's kind of like a Dr. Tom, but less polite. James is more blunt, and authentic; he says, "You're like a guy who looks into a mirror, and when he walks away, forgets what he looks like." We love mirrors, as long as we can walk away from what we see.

A QUESTION TO GET YOU THINKING:

WHY ARE WE TO "COUNT IT ALL JOY" TO FACE TRIALS IN OUR JOURNEY ON THIS EARTH?



¹James uses the Greek word ἡδονών (*hayd-o-nohn*), the source of our English word "hedonism."

CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT

Assuming James was written rather early (before 50AD), and possibly the first book in the New Testament, then his epistle also provides a wealth of information about key issues facing the early church. People intellectualized and/or spiritualized their religion. They based their faith on their *own* faithfulness, and/or their faith in their *intellectualized* connection to God. But, actually do something for others? “Oh no—I have faith.” Or, “oh no—I can quote Scripture from here to kingdom come.”

MINDBYTE NO. 1:

WHAT WOULD JAMES EMPHASIZE IF HE WERE WRITING ABOUT TODAY'S CHURCH PROBLEMS?

Although accepted as canonical since the 4th century, James has been nonetheless a controversial epistle. Among the “issues” are:

1. Luther had trouble reconciling its emphasis on “doing” and as a threat to his assertion that salvation and/or sanctification is based on “faith alone.” Even though he argued it was not written by an apostle, but later described James as “a good book, because it sets up no doctrines of men but vigorously promulgates the law of God.”²
2. The authenticity of James was doubted by Theodore of Mopsuestia in the mid-fifth century. Eusebius classes it among the *Antilegomena* or “contested writings” (*Historia ecclesiae*, 3.25; 2.23) because several western churches don’t even mention using it. Gaius Marius Victorinus, in his commentary on the *Epistle to the Galatians*, openly questioned whether the teachings of James were heretical.
3. It was clearly written for Christians with a Judaic heritage, and as a consequence emphasizes following the Law—its fully detailed and straightforward support for Torah-observance is unique within the New Testament.



James the half-brother of Jesus the Christ
Peter Paul Rubens

Assuming the author of James is indeed the half-brother of Jesus, the book of James shows just how great a linkage there is between the so-called “old” and “new” scriptures. Editors of the ESV, for example, assert James is “the Proverbs of the New Testament.” The book also is a great testimony about my Christ’s influence—this is a book written by a man very close to Jesus, but who did not believe his half-brother to be the Christ until much later in life. Yes, James became the *δουλος* (*doulos*, slave or a bonded servant) of Father God and the Lord Jesus the Christ. James became a *δουλος doer*.

James begins by emphasizing and commenting about trials, wisdom, and God’s bounty as a gracious and uniquely good God. The trials preserve us through perseverance. God’s wisdom not only overcomes our shortcomings, it is available just for the asking, and we worship a God who permits only the best for His children. And, on top of all that, Holy Spirit calls on us to practice our religion as if we had a genuine relationship with the Christ.

²Luther’s Works (American Edition) 35:395

JAMES CALLS US OUT

James 1:1-8. *Opening Salvos*. This letter is from James, the half-brother of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. He calls himself a slave³ to God and the Christ. He addresses his comments to believers beyond the church at Jerusalem; to wit, the dispersed (diaspora). He says:

When you face trials, all kinds of trials, it is a time for joy (χαρὰν and χάρις same root). Why? When you and your faith are tested by trials, your faith becomes more steadfast. You know this, and steadfastness finishes the work to which we have been assigned. Our goal is maturity and completeness, not lacking in anything.

Now, if you lack wisdom, ask God. He gives generously to all without finding fault. It will be given to you. Remember, however, your doubt can mess up your belief (πίστει). People with such doubt, such judging, are like waves in the sea—blown around by the wind. Your doubt can mess you up in big ways; don't think you will receive a certain thing from the Lord our God. To expect otherwise—you're not only double-minded (δίψυχος only used by James here and in 4:8), you're a child of chaos (ἀκατάστατος, only used by James here and 3:8) in all you do.

- Q Which is the proper translation today for James' attribution—a slave, servant, or bondservant of Christ?
- Q Why is there joy/grace derived from trials? What is the trial for a Muslim who follows Christ? Yours?
- Q What is it that we lack when our faith has not been tempered, tested, indicted?
- Q Why does God give wisdom generously, without finding fault in that person?
- Q If doubt supports a duplicitous, chaotic member of the faith, what are we to do about doubt to ask confidently God for wisdom?
- Q About what do you doubt the most in your faith journey toward mature completion?

JAMES 1:1-8

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

²Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

³Undoubtedly the background for the concept of being the Lord's slave or servant is to be found in the Hebrew Scriptures. For the Hebrew believer this concept did not connote drudgery, but honor and privilege. It was used of national Israel at times (Isa 43:10), but was especially associated with famous Hebrew personalities, including such great men as Moses (Josh 14:7), David (Ps 89:3; cf. 2 Sam 7:5, 8) and Elijah (2 Kgs 10:10); all these men were "servants (or slaves) of the Lord."

Though δοῦλος (*doulos*) is normally translated "servant," the word does not bear the connotation of a free individual serving another. BDAG notes that "'servant' for 'slave' is largely confined to Biblical translations and early American times...in normal usage at the present time the two words are carefully distinguished" (BDAG 260 s.v.). One good translation is "bondservant" (sometimes found in the ASV for δοῦλος) in that it often indicates one who sells himself into slavery to another. Since this construct is archaic, few today understand its force. Also, many slaves in the Roman world became slaves through Rome's subjugation of conquered nations, kidnapping, or by being born into slave households. —Reference from the NET Bible.

James 1:9-18. A Challenge to our Notion of Blessing.

Believers who are poor should rejoice, take pride in their higher exaltation. It's the rich who should take pride in their lower exaltation. Remember, riches fade like wildflowers. The sun rises, scorches the wild flower—blossoms drop, and so the beauty of the flower. Similarly, the rich will fade away, even while traveling their journey.

So, closer to the Lord God is the person who perseveres under tests because they have stood the test. They will receive the crown (στέφανον) of life (ζωῆς)⁴ promised to those who love Him.

Now, when you're tested, don't be tempted to say "I am tempted by God." The Lord our God is neither tempted by evils (*plural*), nor does He tempt anybody. Reality check: each of us is tempted when by our own evil desires, we are dragged away and enticed (baited).⁵ Then, with our lust conceived, it gives birth to separation from God (sin). Separation from God, when full grown, gives birth to death; i.e., the ultimate separation from God.

So? Don't be fooled, led to wander, my dear ones. Every good, every perfect gift is from God, the Father of heavenly lights (photons) who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through truth. Why? So that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created.

- Q Why are the poor exalted? And, why do the rich have lower levels of exaltation?
- Q What is there about perseverance that confirms the crown of life? [Note: Mark 13:13]
- Q Why would someone say "God is tempting me?" [Note: "I'm just that way." DNA = excuse; enculturation = excuse.]
- Q What's the good news of being a kind of firstfruit of the Lord our God? Bad news?
- Q James uses the metaphor of conception matching desire and _____? Who/what is the other actor in this act of conception? [Note: "is dragged away and enticed."] Is it *always* Satan? What/who else drags away and entices?

JAMES 1:9-18

The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position.¹⁰ But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower.¹¹ For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.

¹²Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

¹³When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;¹⁴ but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

¹⁶Don't be deceived, my dear brothers.¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

¹⁸He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

⁴Most MSS ([C] P 0246 M) read ὁ κύριος (*ho kurios*, "the Lord") here, while others have ὁ θεός (*ho theos*, "God"; 4 33 323 945 1739 *al*). However, several important and early witnesses (P 8 A B Ψ 81 *co*) have no explicit subject. In light of the scribal tendency toward clarification, and the fact that both κύριος and θεός are well represented, there can be no doubt that the original text had no explicit subject. The referent (God) has been specified in the translation for clarity, not because of textual basis. –from the NET Bible

⁵δεδεῖξω *deleázō* (from *delear*, "bait") – properly, to *bait* a hook or set a trap with bait; (figuratively) *entice* a victim into a moral trap, luring them in through their own *selfish impulses*. –Helps Word Studies, © 2011; Strong's 1185

James 1:19-2:4 *Truth Mirrors Only If We Remember.* Bro! Sis! Listen up! All of you must be quick to listen, slow to talk, and slow to become angry. Our anger does not facilitate the righteous life that the Lord our God desires, deserves, and demands. So? Get rid of the skybula, the evil which is so prevalent—accept, humbly, the word of truth planted in you. This is the truth which can save you!

So? Don't merely listen to the word and thus fool yourself. DO WHAT THE TRUTH SAYS TO DO! If you don't, or won't for that matter, you're like a knucklehead who looks into a mirror, walks away and then forgets what you look like. Look intently into the truth, the perfect truth, the perfect law which gives freedom! Continue to do, not just walk away forgetting what you've heard. Do, and you will be closer to the Lord our God.

If any of you considers yourself religious yet does not keep a tight rein on your mouth, you fool yourself—your religion is worthless! Reign your rein. Here's what Father God accepts as pure and faultless religion—look after orphans and widows, keep yourself unpolluted from the evil in this world.

As believers in the Lord Christ Jesus—don't show favoritism. When rich [or prominent] dudes and/or dudettes come into your social circles, are you showing them the best seats, the best attention? And when the less than cool folk enter your domain—are they given less, or even worse, ignored?

Listen up! God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith, to inherit the kingdom He promised to those who live Him. But when you insult the poor, you forget the rich who exploit you? Are they not the ones who can afford the expensive lawyers and drag you into court? Are they not the ones who slander the very name of the One to whom you belong? Get real, brothers and sisters!

JAMES 1:19-2:4

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,²⁰ for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

²¹Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

²²Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.²⁵ But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

²⁶If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

²⁷Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. **2**¹My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus [the] Christ, don't show favoritism. ²Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. ³If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet,"⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

⁵Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?⁶ But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?⁷ Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?

- Q Why are we so quick to talk, and slow to listen? Why do we love getting angry?
- Q How does moral filth get in the way of seeing, and remembering, what's truly in James' mirror?
- Q How does doing our faith improve our faith? [1:25]
- Q Why did James use orphans & widows as indicators of a true, an undefiled faultless religion? Avoiding the world's moral pollution?
- Q Why are the poor more blessed than the rich (i.e., closer to the Lord our God)?
- Q Why are we prone to show favoritism?
- Q Why is favoritism so evil? [2:4; 4:11]

