

Scripture Reading:

James 1:1 “James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings. **2** My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, **3** knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. **4** But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. **5** If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. **6** But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. **7** For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; **8** he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. **9** Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, **10** but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. **11** For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits. **12** Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. **14** But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. **15** Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. **16** Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. **17** Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. **18** Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

The Joy & Crown of the Church

**Preaching at Trinity Covenant Church in Santa Cruz CA
on Sunday June 3, 2007**

Greetings from the saints at Church of the King Sacramento!

It has been a blessing to assist with your pulpit supply and we appreciate the opportunity and your hospitality!

One advantage to rotating pulpit supply is that you get everyone “best” sermons! What is missed is having a series of sermons or the expositional preaching through a book of the Bible.

I have decided to start of series of sermons from the Book of James for this young work: I will be somewhat conflicted in my prayers as I would desire to finish the series while praying that you have a full-time pastor before I have the time to finish!

Since, these may be many weeks apart and Lord-willing I will not finish, I have put together a set of notes on where I will be going and would encourage much study and discussion on the Book of James! [copied at the end of this sermon]

Why the Book of James? A couple of reasons...

As you can see from the notes, I believe James has seven important messages for a young church work.

This is certainly not an exhaustive study of James or even the only way to see its structure: But like all of the Scriptures James is like a finely cut diamond whose beauty can be seen from different angles and light.

Also, I have always liked standing up for the under-dog!

- James is often seen as the black sheep of the New Testament?**
- Even Martin Luther called it an “Epistle of straw”**
- Some see James as being in conflict with Paul and certainly the reformation teachings of justification by faith alone!**
- Some see James as too Jewish...like the Old Testament, or the Sermon on the Mount**

However, I think the **REAL** reason is the very reason that James is a good place to focus as a young church:

➤ In our flesh, James tells us things we do **NOT** want to hear!

We will see in each of these messages that James has a simple lesson to teach

We will see in each of these messages how James uses simple illustrations that the children will see clearly but many adults try to explain away!

The Joy and Crown of the Church

We don't want to suffer

The Mercy of the Church

We don't want a messy Church

The Faith of the Church

Don't want to worry about good works

The Pilot of the Church

Don't want to control our tongue or selves

The confession of the Church

We like our sins

The mission of the Church

We want to be in control

The prayers of the Church

Don't really want to believe that our prayers can be effective

➤ So our first lesson in James chapter one concerns the “The Joy and crown of the Church”

James begins with a simple greeting:

1: 1 “James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.”

A very warm greeting which continues throughout the epistle”

1: 2-- “My brethren” 1: 19-- “my beloved brethren” 2: 1-- “my brethren”

2:14-- “my brethren” 3:1-- “my brethren” 3:10-- “my brethren” 4 :11-- “brethren” 5 :7-- “brethren” and finally verses 12 & 19: they are again brethren.

- **Referring to the twelve tribes scattered abroad does NOT make this a “Jewish” Epistle that will stand in contrast too much of what Paul writes as the Apostle to the gentiles: Quite the opposite!**

James is showing that after Pentecost and the slaying of Stephan the new Israel, the Church, has been scattered abroad to take the Gospel to the nations as a fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham. These are timeless messages for all the local churches down through the ages!

In verses 2-18, James will discuss trials and temptations and this is where our fleshly objection rears its ugly head:

- **We simple do NOT want are all those trials, sufferings and temptations**
- **James’ point is that they are always with us in this fallen world and within ourselves and that Christ came to give us victory over them**
- **To ignore this reality does not mean we get to pass on the trials & temptation! We will still face them. It only means more suffering, weakness and even death.**

THAT is our simple lesson for today:

Joy and a Crown from God, or depression and despair on our own!

First James deals with trials that are external, and then he addresses temptation that come from within

There is an important difference between being tested and being tempted.

In the wilderness, Jesus was tested by God, but he was tempted by Satan.

There is also a difference between internal temptations that arise from our own sinful inclinations and external ones.

Jesus was virgin born sinless, and thus free of internal temptations, but Jesus could be tempted externally.

With all that in mind, let's look at the text:

1:2 “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.”

- **We will miss or misunderstand most of what James is teaching IF we fail to ask this IMPORTANT question: What faith is James talking about?**
 - Some sort of faith you have produced?
 - Some sort of decision we have made?
 - Some sort of human will-power to overcome sin & temptation?

Absolutely NOT: James knows no other faith than the gracious saving faith which Paul explains in detail to the Saints at Ephesus where he reminds them in the second Chapter of his epistle:

2:8-9 “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

James 1:4 “But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

- **We all want to quote & claim verse 5!**
- **However, we miss the fact that the key is in verse 4: We are told to “be perfect & complete lacking nothing” Quite a command!**
- **Your faith must be faith IN Christ... It cannot be your trying to have faith**
- **Now James gives an illustration:**

James 1:6 “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

- **The contrast that James draws here is between being “in faith” and having “my faith.”**

We should NEVER doubt God

We should always doubt ourselves

- **We must understand the simple illustration of the wave being tossed:**
- **This stands in contrast with resting in God with Joy & a Crown!**
- **BUT you say, I don't think that I have that kind of faith!**

A reaction that Jesus understands!

Mark 9:23,24: "Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!""

- **The trials are not just the big ones – it is all of life and you cannot as a Christian escape them.**
- **It is NOT a question of whether we want the trials and tribulations, but rather whether we accept God's grace to handle them!**

James goes on to illustrate this in verses 9-11

James 1:9 "Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits."

- **Should bring to mind the publican and the Pharisee that went up to the Temple to pray.**

Note well that the rich person, who is in the better position from our human standpoint, gets the more stern warning

Now James turns to the temptations:

James 1:12 "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

Enduring = crown! Again, this is not something we can do...it is promised to those who love Jesus.

ONLY those "in faith" love Jesus

This is the promise of the Covenant and that promise is to you and your children! To them and to us!

James 1:13 “Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.”

- **Again, the contrast is stark and the consequences are severe.**
- **If we try to muster up faith from within, we will not survive external trials, nor internal temptations**

[Mention message on confession and NOT making excuses: Adam in the garden.]

James 1:17 “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.”

- **Beautiful picture of God as the father of lights bringing forth sons and daughters for glory!**
- **But what if we have doubts?**
Abraham sure did!

Try to reflect this week on God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis chapter 15: “Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; ...And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”

We have the sure promises of God’s faithfulness

Rest on them this week and you will know the Joy and Crown of God’s salvation

Ignore them and you will be overcome with trials and temptations from within and without.

MESSAGES FOR A YOUNG CHURCH FROM THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

1) THE JOY & CROWN OF THE CHURCH JAMES 1:1-18

Simple Lesson: God's gracious gifts of faith & wisdom enable us to joyfully endure the trials and temptation of this life.

Simple Illustrations: Waves on the sea – flowers fading

Our Fleshly Objection: We don't want to suffer!

2) THE MERCY OF THE CHURCH JAMES 1:19 – 2:13

Simple Lesson: We stand before God's judgment seat only because of His mercy, so we must show mercy to others!

Simple Illustrations: Man looking in a mirror – Rich man v. poor man

Our Fleshly Objection: We don't want a messy Church!

3) THE FAITH OF THE CHURCH JAMES 2:8 – 2:26

Simple Lesson: James joins Jesus, Paul, Peter, our confessions and the great reformers in reminding us that we are saved by faith alone, and that this faith is never alone! James rightly puts the emphasis on practice not theory!

Simple Illustrations: Naked & hungry person – believing demons

Our Fleshly Objection: We don't want to worry about good works!

4) THE PILOT OF THE CHURCH JAMES 3:1-18

Simple Lesson: After chapter two we know that standing still is not an option. Depending on who "pilots" our tongues, Trinity Covenant will either be a strong refuge guiding people through stormy waters or you can set devastating fires that will rage throughout Santa Cruz churches and the community.

Simple Illustrations: Bits in the mouth of horses – Rudders on ships

Our Fleshly Objection: We want to speak our minds!

5) THE CONFESSION OF THE CHURCH JAMES 3:13 – 4:17

Simple Lesson: James teaches how we must be brutally honest in the confession of our sins before our Holy God. This is why the confession of sin is an essential part of Covenant Renewal Worship even for believers.

Simple Illustration: Wisdom from above v. wisdom of the earth

Our Fleshly Objection: We like our sins!

6) THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH JAMES 5:1-11

Simple Lesson: As a young church Trinity Covenant must address the questions of who is in charge and where as a church you are going: You must truly acknowledge the Lord's sovereignty & be willing to go where He leads you.

Simple Illustrations: Planning a simple trip – Tarnished gold

Our Fleshly Objection: We want to be in control!

7) THE PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH JAMES 5:10-20

Simple Lesson: James will teach us the importance of approaching the Throne of Grace in prayer

Simple Illustration: Elijah's prayers for drought and rain

Our Fleshly Objection: We don't really believe that our prayers are answered!