

James 1A

A little boy's new baby brother was screaming up a storm.

"Where'd we get him?" he asked his mom.

"He came from heaven," his mother replied

"Whoa!" said the little boy. "I can see why they threw him out!"

- During Jesus' brief earthly life, He grew up in a home that was probably as normal as any other Palestinian family
 - His earthly father was a tradesman, working with stone for constructing buildings, which was the carpentry of that day
 - Jesus was the son of Mary but His Father was not earthly
 - He was conceived by the Holy Spirit as a new Adam, not made of the same flesh as the first Adam
 - But Joseph and Mary had other children that were conceived in the natural way
 - One was a man named Jude, who wrote the NT letter by the same name
 - Another half brother of Jesus was a man named Jacob
 - Taking the Hebrew name Jacob and translating it first into Greek and later into Latin and eventually English, we arrive at the name James
 - Both Jude and James grew up with their older half-brother Jesus, living and working in Nazareth
 - We know nothing about their early years together, but knowing that Jesus was the Spiritual Light and they were born into spiritual darkness, we might assume there was some friction
 - Yet we can also assume there was sibling love and affection
- Around AD 26, Jesus begins His earthly ministry and begins teaching in the Galilee that He was the Messiah
 - His very first declaration was made in His home town of Nazareth in the synagogue

- And as Jewish men in Nazareth, it's likely that Jesus' half brothers were present when they heard Him declare that He fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy of a coming Savior
 - We can just imagine how that declaration must have struck Jesus' brothers
- In fact, we don't have to imagine, because Scripture tells us clearly how Jesus' brothers viewed His ministry
 - In John 7 we see His brothers showing nothing but contempt for Jesus' claims

[John 7:2](#) Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Booths, was near.

[John 7:3](#) Therefore His brothers said to Him, "Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing.

[John 7:4](#) "For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world."

[John 7:5](#) For not even His brothers were believing in Him.

- Jesus' brothers advised Jesus to go to Jerusalem to declare Himself to be Messiah
 - Because they saw their brother engaged in an impossible task: that of convincing the world He was the Messiah by preaching to among the obscure towns of the Galilee
 - But they knew better
 - They encouraged Him to go to Jerusalem so He might be accepted
 - Because they didn't believe His claims, and thought it was just a political campaign
- After Jesus' death and resurrection, He appeared to James according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:7, and by His appearing, Jesus brought His brother to faith
 - After that moment, James became a faithful apostle and leader in the church living in Jerusalem
 - He never again described himself as a (half) brother to the Lord
 - Forgoing his claim to any fleshly relationship with Jesus, he instead identified himself by his spiritual association: as a bond servant of God and Christ

[James 1:1](#) James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.

- You notice James also identifies his audience for this letter: those of the twelve tribes who are living dispersed abroad
 - Let's talk about this audience for a moment
- The letter of James is likely the earliest written scripture of the New Testament
 - It was written perhaps as early as AD 45, barely 12 years after Jesus' crucifixion
 - It was written before Paul began his missionary journeys or wrote his letters
 - It was written before any of the gospel accounts had been recorded
 - It was written before the temple was destroyed
 - And it was written at a time when the church was largely comprised of Jewish believers living in the land of Israel
 - With a small number of Jewish believers living in surrounding regions of Asia Minor and as far away as Rome
 - We classify James as one of the Jewish epistles in the New Testament
 - It was written from Jerusalem to the Jewish believers who had been dispersed outside the Land, meaning outside Palestine
 - Altogether, there are five Jewish epistles in the NT: James, Hebrews, Jude and 1 & 2 Peter
 - The five Jewish letters share common themes, in keeping with their common audience
 - Two of the Jewish epistles – Jude and 2 Peter – were written to contend with false teaching among Jewish believers, particularly the Judaizers
 - The other three – Hebrews, James and 1 Peter – taught believers how to withstand the persecution that came upon Jews when they proclaimed the name of Christ

- A Jew who confessed Christ was particularly susceptible to persecution, since their confession usually resulted in them being ostracized from their Jewish family and friends
- James himself was eventually stoned to death in Jerusalem for violating the Law on orders of the Jewish high priest
- All five Jewish epistles are intensely practical sermons on Christian living
 - They focus on how to live as a believer, especially to Jewish believers who have come out of a life based on Jewish traditions and Law
 - They don't offer much Christian doctrine or theology
 - They speak to the consequences of faith, not to the origin or content of faith
 - James in particular is intensely focused on a believer's behavior rather than on his belief or knowledge
 - It is a book concerned with sanctification rather than salvation
- As we dive into the content of James' letter, we see the first theme is summarized in vs.2-4

[James 1:2](#) Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,

- The first theme of James' letter is proper Christian attitude and persistence when experiencing trials
 - The Greek language used in v.2 is especially important to understanding James' first purpose in writing
 - First, look at the end of the verse...encountering various trials
 - The word encounter is *peripipto*, which means to fall into something
 - It doesn't mean to yield to something, as in to fall into sin
 - Rather, it means to come upon something

- The same word is used in Luke 10 in the parable of the Good Samaritan

[Luke 10:30](#) Jesus replied and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers...”

- Then the phrase “various trials” is an interesting choice of words
 - You’ll see many different interpretations of this phrase
 - Literally it means many colored temptations or varied experiments or tests
 - The sense is of circumstances that take many forms and are brought about for a divine purpose, as a test or experiment
- By trials, is James talking about Christians being persecuted, hated, receiving unfair treatment due to their faith?
 - Yes, as many Jews were experiencing these things in James’ day
- But is James also talking about ordinary difficulties like illnesses? Financial difficulties? Relationship struggles? Unemployment? Addictions? Phobias?
 - Yes. All colors of trials and temptations, James says
 - He’s talking about the myriad of life circumstances that come upon a believer
 - Problems we face, urges we must resist, desires we must control
 - But now because of our faith, we are called to respond differently to these circumstances
- When James uses words like “come upon us” and “experiment” or “test,” he’s not just describing the quality of these trials
 - He’s also indicating their origin, of Who brings these trials
 - They originate with God
 - He brings them upon us; they don’t happen as a matter of chance

- They are a consequence of His Sovereign purpose to test us

- Charles Spurgeon put it this way:

I believe that every particle of dust that dances in the sunbeam does not move an atom more or less than God wishes – that every particle of spray that dashes against the steamboat has its orbit, as well as the sun in the heavens – that the chaff from the hand of the winnower is steered as the stars in their courses. The creeping of an aphid over the rosebud is as much fixed as the march of the devastating pestilence – the fall of . . . leaves from a poplar is as fully ordained as the tumbling of an avalanche.

- It's this understanding that God guides our circumstances and brings these trials upon us that enables us to understand and obey James' command at the outset of this verse
 - James commands us to consider or count these circumstances as all joy
 - Consider or count means to make up your mind concerning something or to judge something
 - Our attitude is a product of our will, of our judgments and knowledge
 - We have a choice in how we view our circumstances, especially those that come upon us because of our walk of faith
 - And the choice we should make is to count trials as joy
 - In Greek the word joy is *chara*, which means supreme joy, the highest joy
 - While we could face trials with fear or anger or sorrow, as Christians we are to choose to be joyful
 - And we come to this attitude not naturally but rather as a result of our specific knowledge
 - First, from v.2 we can know that our circumstances were ordained by the Lord Himself as a divine test
 - An experiment to see how we will respond, what we will do and how we are maturing in our walk as Christians
 - As Spurgeon says, everything we experience in life comes about according to God's will

- And God brings these trials about so that we may pass the test
- In high school, I had an English professor who loved surprise tests
 - In fact, there were no scheduled exams in his courses
 - He would give all tests at unannounced times
 - When he announced his surprise test, it was always a trial
 - But when I was prepared for the test, I approached the moment very differently than when I was caught off guard
 - When I was prepared, I knew I would pass the test and receive a good grade
 - And so I could see the trial as joy, simply because I had the knowledge and preparation to meet the test and come out the other side with a good result
 - On the other hand, if my knowledge was lacking, I would respond to the trial with worry and despair and usually receive a poor grade
- James says our approach to the trials of life work according to a similar principle
 - The more we understand about how God uses trials in our life to test us and to assign an eternal grade, the better prepared we will be to face them properly

[James 1:3](#) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

[James 1:4](#) And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- James says knowing is the key
 - The Greek word is *ginosko*, which means to understand, to perceive properly
 - To see things in the right way
 - Are we seeing our trials in our life the right way?
- You remember the story I told of how my car was stolen from my garage a few years ago

- As I watched the thief drive away, I remember thinking what was God trying to prepare me for through this experience
 - I could have been angry or despondent
 - But I knew God was in control, and He had allowed this person to take my car
 - And I knew that my faith was most on display under these circumstances
- The knowledge that this event was under God's control changed my perception of the event and allowed me to react differently, even joyfully
 - Why was I joyful? Because I realized I was passing the test
 - The enemy had taken his best shot at me, and God allowed it and I wasn't letting my flesh drive my response
 - And I could be joyful because I knew that God was prepared to reward me in far greater ways, eternal ways, than the value of any car
- Jesus tell us exactly the same thing regarding the tests and trials we face in faith

[Matt. 5:11](#) "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

[Matt. 5:12](#) "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

- We are receiving tests for the sake of Heavenly reward
 - Have you ever considered that each time you suffer through a trial, there's something eternal at stake?
 - A grade from the Lord is being assigned us each time we come through one of those trials
 - And when we face trials successfully, we learn endurance
 - The word in Greek is *hupomone*, which means patience, steadfastness
 - James is talking about a consistency in our Christian character and attitude that doesn't vary with the circumstances

- We aren't on cloud 9 one day, and down in the dumps the next day
- If that describes us, then it's a sign according to Scripture that we still have a lot of maturing left to do in our Christian walk
 - Or perhaps it means we haven't been passing our God-appointed tests
 - And if we aren't, then it's probably a consequence of a lack of knowledge
 - Of not recognizing that God brings us these circumstances
 - Or that our response is being graded for eternal purposes
- As James says in v.4, our endurance through trials (i.e., our consistent patient attitude and response to each difficulty) will have a perfect result
 - But the word for perfect means something else in Greek
 - The word is *telelos*, which means complete or mature
 - James says that endurance leads to the result of complete maturity, perfection in that sense
 - Brothers and sisters, do you desire to reach the point of spiritual maturity?
 - Do you yearn to reflect Christ in your life and become that good and faithful servant that pleases his or her Master?
 - Then James says the road that takes us to maturity is filled with trials and tests
 - And as each test comes, we count it joy because we know we are learning patience and endurance, which brings maturity
 - As James says, you will lack nothing in the area of spiritual maturity
 - You will be greatly blessed as a result of your close walk with the Spirit
 - On the other hand, what do you think the Lord will do with a Christian who is lacking spiritual maturity?

- The logical conclusion is He will bring trials, just as He did for the Jewish Christians in James' day
- And just like my English professor, when we face a trial unsuccessfully, God's likely to bring another soon to give us another opportunity to do better
 - Have you ever faced your life's trials with that thought? That these trials are coming from God like quizzes in a class, and you're supposed to excel not despair
 - But the key to meeting the test successfully is in our wisdom and knowledge

James 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

- James acknowledges that often the believer lacks the wisdom to face trials successfully
 - Just as when I lacked wisdom to pass those surprise English tests, we risk failing the tests God brings us for lack of godly wisdom
 - But James tells us that our Father in Heaven is ready and willing to provide us with the needed wisdom to pass His tests if we only ask
 - And He will answer our requests for wisdom in the face of trials without reproach
 - The Greek being *oneidizo* which means casting an insult
 - There's an important difference between my high school English instructor and our Father in Heaven
 - If I had stopped in the middle of one of those surprise English tests to ask my instructor for the knowledge I lacked, I can tell you what I would have learned
 - I would have learned not to ever do that again
 - Because my request would have been met with a reproach
- Consider all that James is saying concerning trials
 - Our Father wants His children to grow in spiritual maturity

- Because our degree of spiritual maturity in this life will be the Lord's measuring stick for assigning us honor and reward in the Kingdom
 - And our Father desires that we please Him and bring Him glory so that He may reward us
- So James says that trials and tests and experiments will come upon us, by God's Hand
 - And He brings us these trials not to harm us but to develop within us endurance and patience and persistence
 - Which over time give opportunity for us to develop spiritual maturity
 - And with that maturity, we can serve Him in steadfastness and faithfulness
- But then incredibly, James says these tests are open book tests
 - God is willing to give us the answers, the wisdom we need to pass His tests with flying colors
- Did you notice James says that when we recognize we lack the knowledge to face our trials in a godly and mature manner, we are to ask God...
 - Not Oprah
 - Not the Christian counselors or the latest Christian bestseller
 - Not horoscopes
 - Not even our family and friends
- James says we should ask God, meaning petitioning Him in prayer and seeking Him in His word
 - And James says the Lord will answer our request
 - Always
 - The Lord is willing to give us the godly wisdom we need to pass His tests, because the whole point of taking a test is to pass
- Our teachers didn't give us tests to cause us to fail...well, most teachers
 - Tests were opportunities for us to succeed and grow

- And when we failed, it was only because we lacked knowledge
- James was writing to Jewish believers who were facing many trials, many difficulties
 - And in the decades to come the persecution only grew worse, much worse
 - How will they respond to those trials? Will they give a good testimony and please their Father?
 - Only if they have prepared, and practiced and endured earlier trials
 - And counted it all joy when the Lord brought each test knowing it was evidence that the Lord was working in their lives to mature them for an eternal purpose
 - Remember, our final exam isn't even found in this life
 - It comes at the Judgment Seat when the Lord will judge the works of believers
 - And we should all want to be ready for that day, to be counted perfect and complete