

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Life Application Sunday School Class

Book of James - Session 7

March 10, 2002

SUMMARY:

Believers are commanded to rejoice in times of trial. The command to rejoice is not a command to feel, but to consider. We need to consider God's purpose that is being fulfilled through the trials.

One of the main objectives in a trial is to replace our agenda with God's agenda. We need wisdom (God's agenda) when facing trials. One item on God's agenda is to produce perseverance that will carry us to the completion of our redemption, also called glorification, also called the manifestation of our sonship. God also uses trials to display His faithfulness and salvation for His glory, to test and purify our faith, and to expose and remove imitation faith. Trials have the ability to reveal our true character. For the true believer, God will use trials to expose and remove the false and strengthen the genuine.

In time of trial, we need to ask for wisdom in an attitude of trust. To pray in faith means we pray believing God is in control, He is wise and good and loves us, and that will obey what He shows us.

A person who doubts God is a double-minded person. A double-minded person has a fundamental problem. He has not trusted fully in the Lord. He has not surrendered his life to the Lordship of Christ. According to the very words of Jesus, you can't partially live for God. If your devotion is divided, then you are disloyal to God, and according to Jesus, you hate Him. God uses trials to expose divided loyalties. The root problem that causes double mindedness is an impure heart. And the cure for double mindedness is to recognize it, confess it, mourn over it, humble ourselves, and draw near to God, who alone can purify our hearts.

Trials are the great equalizer. James contrasted two types of believers; the brother in humble circumstances; and the brother who is rich – full of possessions, plenteous in goods, wealthy. The poorest and lowliest person in this life that is a true Christian brother can rejoice that he has been born into the family of God. The materially rich and exalted person that is God's elect can rejoice that God has humbled him and brought him to recognize his spiritual poverty, that he has been given the grace to call on the Lord, that God has poured out mercy in his life and that he will endure to the end and receive the crown of life.

Trials provide opportunity for temptation. Especially in times of trial and hardship, we are tempted to stray off the path and wander into temptation and sin. The battle begins in our minds. The strategy of the enemy is to get us to doubt God's word and His integrity. If we start to listen to his lies, and begin to doubt God's goodness, wisdom, or sovereignty, we become vulnerable to our desires. If we choose not to follow God's wisdom, which is His Word, then we will follow our desires. Once our desires are in the driver's seat, we are headed for trouble. We can better resist temptation if we understand the battle.

Finally, we looked at interferences that hinder us from receiving God's wisdom in time of trial. When in the midst of trial, we are tempted to talk too much, listen too little, and get angry. Wisdom is attained when we ask God for it in faith with open ears and a closed mouth. When we are angry and talking our focus is generally on others. Anger, resentment, and our agenda for "justice" in the situation only serve to obscure God's agenda of purifying and strengthening us. Instead of trying to straighten out everyone else, we are to

be ridding ourselves of our moral failures and evil so that we might be able to hear God. But listening is not the end of the road. Once we quit talking, and start listening, and have confessed and forsaken the known sin in our life, God will show us ourselves in the mirror of His Word. But just recognizing our faults is not the ultimate goal. Godly change is the goal. James says that if we do not act based on what we hear, we deceive ourselves. It is a deception to believe that we are spiritual and pleasing to God just because we know His Word and can recognize and define our problems.

If we just hear God's Word, and talk about God's Word, but don't put God's Word to practical use in our lives, then our religion is worthless, and we are deceived. True grace produces true change that will be evidenced in our speech, our relationships, and our commitment. We will be characterized by compassion, mercy, goodness, and display a selfless love and concern for those in distress, especially those who cannot help themselves.

That last point of review leads right into today's lesson in James chapter 2.

READ James 2:1-13

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. ² Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. ³ If 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? ⁵ Listen, 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? ⁸ If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. ⁹ But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. ¹² Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, ¹³ because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

What is favoritism? The KJV translates it as "respect of persons". It is the acceptance of others based on their outward appearance and social status. It is making mental judgments of others based on outward criteria. This discrimination manifests in how we treat others. It shows up in the attention and concern that we display toward a person; the consideration we give them. The Scriptures, as well as our own experience, teach us that our sinful tendency is to give deference to those who look nice, have the good job, are refined and educated, and carry the appearance of success. This respect of persons also manifest in thinking less of those who have less. In the first century Jewish church, such discrimination was displayed by offering the best seats in the assembly to the wealthy.

What are some ways that we display discrimination today?

Now James gives reasons why we should not show preference to the outwardly successful. First, generally speaking, they are not God's choice. God's economy is much different than the worlds. God intentionally chooses the poor of this world to grant His spiritual riches and inheritance. Note in verse 5 that those ranking low on the economic ladder are seen as poor by the world, but if they are believers, God sees them as rich. Their inheritance is the very kingdom of God! Think about it. A person entering our church house doors may not look too impressive. But appearance can be deceiving. They may be one of God's chosen people. And if

we ignore them, or avoid them because they look unimportant, we could well be ignoring and shunning the Lord Himself! Look at Matthew 25:31-46

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. 34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' 41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' 44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' 45 "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' 46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Look at verse 39-40 and answer this question. What determines if a person is Christ's brothers? Is it based on education, or social status, or economics, or race, or even religious background? No, it has only to do with their relationship to Christ. Since we don't know who God has chosen, we are potentially rejecting Christ if we refuse to respond in mercy and compassion to those who providentially cross our path. Christ says that many of his brothers in this world are hungry, and thirsty, and naked, and destitute, and in prison, and lonely. Many would be classified as failures by worldly standards. The rejects and castaways of the world are prime candidates for the expression of God's mercy and redeeming grace. God specializes in helping the helpless, and taking care of those who are unable to care for themselves.

In the letter of I Corinthians, Paul addressed the problem of divisions. People were taking pride in following certain leaders, and rejecting those who weren't apart of their particular group. Paul reminds them of their background:

Listen to I Corinthians 1:26-29: 26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him.

Who is God going to choose to save and add to our church? According to this passage, it is primarily going to be those who are not wise by human standards, not influential, and not of noble birth. They are likely going to be people that the world rejects and despises, the weak, the poor, the sick, the lame, and the misfits. Paul says that God purposely chooses people like this to shame the wise and strong of this world, to nullify the things that are, so that He receives the glory and preeminence.

Consider of the ones that God chose to serve as the earthly parents of Jesus. It was a humble carpenter and his wife. Look at the song of Mary in Luke 1:46-56

46 And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. ⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. ⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. ⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful ⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers." ⁵⁶ Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

The sovereign God obviously could have chosen anyone He pleased to birth our Savior. And He chose to use a humble teenage girl engaged to a poor carpenter.

What if Mary and Joseph showed up at our door needing a place to stay? How would we respond? Whenever we cross paths with anyone, at the grocery store, the post office, at Wal-Mart the first of the month, at church on Sunday morning – remember this: That person standing next to you could be one of God's chosen. They certainly are a member of God's creation. And God alone knows that person's heart. He is not impressed by their outward appearance, the way they are dressed, what they drive, where they work, or their social status. And neither should we be. James says if we accept or ignore people based on outward appearance, that we have become judges with evil thoughts. Discrimination is evidence of a sinful heart.

James goes on to say in verses 6-7 that it is often those who are rich and influential that cause the most trouble for Christ and His Church. It is those who desire to be in control and have preeminence and power over others that are most threatened by the message of Christ. This passage is not teaching that we should shun the rich, or avoid them, or discriminate against them. It is saying that we shouldn't give them preferential treatment or think highly of them based on their social or financial status.

Finally, James says that the proper response to everyone is love, especially to those in need. We need to demonstrate mercy and compassion to others, and when we don't, we are breaking God's law and are sinners that will face His judgment. We need to relate to others as Christ has related to us. When we recognize our true condition, our helpless estate, our desperate continual need for God's mercy and help, and compassion, then we will respond accordingly to others that are needy. When we show mercy, we evidence that we have received mercy. When we show hardness and judgment, it is evidence that we are under God's judgment. If we have truly experienced God's mercy and grace, we have been set free to love others, not based on what they deserve, but based on the mercy we have received. We should view every needy person that we come in contact with as a potential recipient for the love and mercy of God that we have received. It could well be that God has brought that person to us to express His love and mercy through us to them.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Where are some specific struggles that we face in this area of discrimination?
2. What are some practical ways that we change to reach out and minister to the needy?
3. Why do we sometimes avoid people that have needs? What changes in our attitudes and beliefs need to occur to obey this passage in James?

Leviticus 19:15 'You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly.

Job 34: 16 "But if *you have* understanding, hear this; Listen to the sound of my words.

17 "Shall one who hates justice rule? And will you condemn the righteous mighty One, 18 Who says to a king, 'Worthless one,' To nobles, 'Wicked

ones'; 19 Who shows no partiality to princes Nor regards the rich above the poor, For they all are the work of His hands? 20 "In a moment they die, and at midnight People are shaken and pass away, And the mighty are taken away without a hand.

Deut 10: 17 "For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. 18 "He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. 19 "So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

Deut 15: 7 "If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; 8 but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need *in* whatever he lacks.

Acts 10: 34 Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand *now* that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.

Eph 6: 7 With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, 8 knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. 9 And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

I Peter 1: 17 If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay *on earth*;

Psalm 72:12 For he will deliver the needy when he cries for help, The afflicted also, and him who has no helper. 13 He will have compassion on the poor and needy,

And the lives of the needy he will save. 14 He will rescue their life from oppression and violence, And their blood will be precious in his sight;

Isaiah 10: 1 Woe to those who enact evil statutes And to those who constantly record unjust decisions, 2 So as to deprive the needy of justice And rob the poor of My people of *their* rights, So that widows may be their spoil And that they may plunder the orphans.