

Paul H. Dixon
Study in James Part 1: God's Purpose for Trials
January 3, 1980

Transcript

Paul H. Dixon:

Thank you, Don and Brian, that's a blessing. This quarter, I'm going to be bringing a series in chapel on the book of James. We're going to start today and I'd like for you to take your Bibles and turn to the book with me, please. I'm not sure that we will be to finish the book this quarter. We're going to start. I'm scheduled to speak on seven occasions this quarter. At least two of them, I may have some difficulty getting back depending on the weather, but I hope that we can be here for all seven and possibly will be able to cover the five chapters, obviously some portions with a great deal of brevity, but we'll at least try to get the highlights of the book.

And I would like to encourage you to do this: number one, read the book a number of times. In fact, you can probably scan the book by reading about 15 or 20 minutes a day. Perhaps some of you would like to have your private devotions from the book of James this quarter. Some of you couples perhaps would like to have your devotions together from the book of James. But let's do some personal reading and studying. I would also like to suggest that you get a commentary from the bookstore and read it. You might like to pick up the paperback commentary by Warren Wiersbe, entitled, Be Mature. If you are not buying his books in the Be series, I would recommend that you do so. Or you might like to buy Tasker's book. I have found that to be one of the better books on James. But purchase a commentary from the bookstore and let's zero in on the book. You would like, perhaps, to share some of the blessings that you get from your own study with your roommates and classmates and various friends.

Let's not hesitate to do that when we're together in the dining hall, to share some of the blessings that God would give us from the word. I would be interested in any truths that you might find, any blessings that you might receive. Maybe you just like to put down a note and send it to me. Something in your own study you find in James. Perhaps you would have questions. You say you covered that portion, brother Dixon, but I didn't understand it, or there's some difficulty there, and you'd like to let me know about that. And perhaps we can address it at a later time. But let's zero in on this book and see if God can't do something for us, very special.

I've given as a title for the entire book, the title Show Your Faith, because I believe that's what James is endeavoring to drive home to these early believers, that it is great to know what you believe, but this has little impact if somehow it doesn't evidence itself in the life. And James was addressing himself to something that is just as needed today. We need our theological positions and our statements of faith, and we cannot overemphasize their importance. But just as vital is how that is demonstrated in the life. God never intended that we just have Bibles that are all marked up and notebooks that are full of notes and heads that are crammed with facts. God gave a truth that it might change our lives and that we in turn might change the world. I'd like to give you an outline of the book a little bit later, but before I do that I'd like to make some general observations regarding the book of James.

First of all, and I would like to suggest that you do take notes, I know many of you do all of the time, but I always like to remind you at the beginning of every quarter, you do retain three to four times as much when you write something down as when you just hear it. So it's good to take notes. And especially when you're making a book study like this, and you'll be building on it as you go through the quarter. By way of general observations, James is a very practical book. This is not to say that the Bible as a whole is not practical, because it is, but obviously there are some books of the Bible that are heavier in doctrine than others and some that are heavier in the practical aspect. James has a great deal of doctrine, but I

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would have to say more on the practical side. And if there's one word that we ought to grasp here at Cedarville College and a word that we ought to emphasize over and over again, it's the word, balance.

As you study the Bible, it's a balance book. As you study Christianity back in the early church, the emphasis was on balance. And historically, there is always been the great danger of those who wanted to be practical, but yet they didn't want to go very deep into the scripture and they didn't want to go heavy into doctrine and they didn't get excited about doctrine. But if you just have a lot of emphasis upon practical living and no emphasis or little emphasis upon doctrine, we become very shallow Christians. In time, it becomes very superficial. But then there are the others who want to be heavy on the doctrine and seemingly would not, or have not placed great emphasis upon how it works out in the life. Almost communicating that if you have the right doctrine, the life automatically follows. That's not so. And what's happened there is that usually, this group historically has become very dead and very dry and become kind of shut off from the world and had no impact upon the world. We want the balance. That's what James would emphasize in the book. But especially, this book is practical.

One of the ways we know that is he uses illustrations over and over and over again, generally those who like to emphasize a practical do major on the illustrations. And James does that. Incidentally, I think the greatest preacher, obviously, who ever walked this earth was Jesus. I also believe he was one who greatly used illustrations. He would teach truths from everyday life. He knew how to get there where the people were living and put it on the shelf where they could get it and apply it to their lives. James, out of 108 verses, used 60 imperatives, or in other words, 60 commands. Out of all the verses in the book, 55% of them have to do with saying here is how you live, here is how truth ought to work in your life.

And I know we live in a day when there is a great emphasis, especially in the seventies, on sharing. And there were even great movements of how we ought to get together in our churches and we don't need preachers, we don't need someone who's a authoritarian, we don't need someone to get up there and tell us how it is, we don't want someone telling us how to do it, we want to get together and we want to share. I want to tell you, I believe there is a degree of emphasis in the Bible where we need to get together and share with each other and learn from each other, but James took the position of authority and he did not mind standing up and saying, this is what you ought to do.

And I don't know about you, but I don't get much out of preaching. When I just go to a service and someone unfolds a lot of truths, but he doesn't drive the truths home to my life. And I want someone to shake me up and stir me up because I need it and you need it. And I'm glad that Larry, you recognize that that's coming home, right? The rest of you, join him in our amen corner the next time I preach, that'll be super. I like it.

A second general observation. Not only is it a practical book, but it is a warm book. James, 20 times in this book, talks about "my brethren." In fact, he uses this more than any other writer in the New Testament with the exception of Paul when he wrote First Thessalonians. And the thing I learned from this is you read the book of James and he didn't cut any corners and he didn't mince any words and he told like it was, and yet it was coupled with a warmth and a love and a genuine interest for those people and they accepted it. And I've told a lot of preachers, you can have a ministry with people and you can tell people anything you want to, and you can preach hard and straight if you love them.

But if you don't love them, you don't have a ministry. In fact, I think the greatest, the number one point in anyone's ministry I know, whether it be in the classroom, whether it be in the pulpit, wherever it might be, has to be a genuine love, interest, concern for people. James manifested that. It's a warm book, a practical book. It's an early book.

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In fact, number three, the earliest New Testament book. When James wrote it, it was during a transitional time, approximately 50 AD, the temple was still standing, many Christians were meeting in the synagogues and it's a book that's filled with the Old Testament. James refers to the Old Testament, at least, he refers to over 20 Old Testament books. He refers to the Sermon on the Mount no less than 15 times. In fact, I have thought that some of you might like to go into the book writing business, you might like to write a book on a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount by James. I've never seen a book like this. But just to take the book of James and see what he has to say about the Sermon on the Mount. So, it's an early book, practical, warm.

Then it's a book that has one basic theme, and that's how a Christian should face trials. The Christians are involved in a constant warfare. These Christians had problems on the outside, problems on the inside, and they had problems with themselves. Problems outside the church, inside the church and inside their hearts. And James would have them to use these problems for God's glory, for their own good and for the salvation of a lost world.

Somehow if we can grasp that, that everything God brings into our lives, he wants us to bring glory to Himself through this. He's allowing that to happen for our own good and for the good of the church, brothers, believers. And He wants this to take place in our lives so that we can have an impact and so that he can bring salvation to those who know not Christ around us. Then I would also like to say by way of general observation and conclusion, there is no conflict between James and Paul. There are those who say Paul taught salvation by faith, James taught salvation by works. Not so. The best way I can sum it up, someone said, "Faith justifies the man and works justify the faith." Don't ever forget it. The word faith is found 14 times in the book of James, works are found 13 times. There's the balance again. Works and the faith. With that as a background, let's get into the first chapter. I hope to cover the first chapter today and then on the next time that will be speaking, which will be the Monday following the missionary conference.

As we get into the first chapter, if the title of the entire book is, Show Your Faith, then the title of the first chapter has to be, Show Your Faith in the Warfare. Show Your Faith in the Warfare. Chapter two, Show Your Faith by Your Works. Chapter three, Show Your Faith by Your Words. Chapter four, Show Your Faith and Be Not Worldly. Chapter five, Show Your Faith by Your Wealth. Now, if you didn't get that, someone did, you can get it from them or else we'll be running it by again as we move on through the book.

The first chapter, Show Your Faith in the Warfare. The introduction to the chapter and to the book is the first verse, "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the 12 tribes, which are scattered abroad. Greetings." Immediately we know who wrote the book, James. One problem, which James? There are five of them. Was this the James of that inner circle, Peter, James and John? No. Was it the other James who is referred to as an apostle and we know very little about him? No. This is James, the half brother of Jesus Christ.

It's interesting that John chapter seven verse five, we are told that James and Jude, coincidentally, when Jude wrote his book, referred to himself as the brother of Jesus Christ. I'm sure you've noted that. If you haven't, you just want to turn to the book of Jude and noticed the first verse "Jude, the brother of Jesus Christ." And in John chapter seven verse five, we note that James nor Jude believed in Jesus. They were both skeptics. And yet the skeptics became the servants. They became the slaves. That's the Greek word for servant. James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. I'd like to suggest that they became saints, servants after the resurrection, that in first Corinthians chapter 15 verse seven, that because of

the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it had this tremendous impact up on James and Jude, the brothers of Christ, that they were converted.

And of course we know that James became a leader in the early church, the pastor of the church in Jerusalem. We studied the book of Acts in chapter 12 and chapter 15. And we see his leadership. I think probably in the early church, though, we usually would believe Peter to be the leader, in some respects, those early Christians looked to James more than they did to Peter. Great Saint and he writes this book. Now we also find the group of people he is addressing. He's addressing the 12 tribes, which are scattered abroad. Now this is the dispersion. And of course the Greek word for scattered is the Greek word for dispersed. And it has to do with those people, those Jews who were living in the Roman empire, those who were living outside of Palestine. We need to bear that in mind as we read the book. Transitional time, writing to Jewish converts. They know the background of the Judaism, and now they've moved into Christianity and all the changes that are taking place.

And whenever you study a book, find out the background so you can understand how those people would receive it, and then tell how we can see how it works in the 20th century. But another observation, you remember what happened in the book of Acts? In the book of Acts, we will not turn, but in chapter eight verse one, it talks about a persecution that arose in the early church. And the scripture says they were dispersed. Same Greek word, scattered. And in chapter eight verse four, it tells us that those people were scattered like seed throughout the world and they went everywhere preaching the gospel.

God has a purpose, even in scattering. He used the persecution. He used the tremendous time of trial to reach the world. May I suggest that we are gathered here and faculty, staff, administrators, as we begin a new quarter with the unique privilege of having over 1300 young people that in the Providence of God have been gathered here at Cedarville College for a period of time so that God might scatter them like seed throughout the world for the Lord Jesus Christ. I can't think of a greater privilege in all the world that God has given us to help train the seed before they're scattered.

As we get into the text, now beginning with verse two, I want to give you a simple outline for the chapter. I want us to note God's purpose for trials. Number one, why does God send trials into our life? Why does He allow them to come? Number two, God's provision for trials. Number three, God's program for trial. I'm not even sure that we'll make it into number two, but we shall at least endeavor to cover number one, God's purpose for trials. Let's begin with verse two. "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations." And the first thing we have to do is find out what that word temptation means.

Now, it is not a mistranslation. I have a little bit of a problem with people who do that very carelessly and talk about mistranslations, et cetera. The problem is that the word has changed in the English language. And usually today, when we think of a temptation, we think of something bad, some kind of temptation to sin, something that would come into our lives that is evil, that would lead us into evil. No, that's not the meaning of the word at all. In fact, in First Corinthians 10:13, that's usually how we face that. "There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man, but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you're able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape that ye may be able to bear it." Same word. Better translated, trial.

First Corinthians 10:13 is not just the idea of temptation to evil. There is no trial that has come into your life, but you are not able to bear it. It's not uncommon. And James is saying, brethren, count it all joy and when you fall into diverse trials. Usually you can arrive at the best translation of the word, whether temptation or trial, from the context. And obviously here, it would have to be trial. May I also point out

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that it's a diverse trial and the word for diverse is the word for many colored. They're all kinds of trials. You have trials that just come with being a human being, sickness, surgeries, deaths. There are trials that come, especially because we are Christians, that other people do not face. There are trials that come in our families. There are trials that come in our place of employment. There are trials that come uniquely at a college, at a Christian college at Cedarville like this. There are trials that you will face now that you will never have to face again.

But you will face them here. And if you face them correctly, they will help you face the trials of the future. And I want you to notice that James did not say, if you fall into many colored trials, he said, when. The question is not if you're ever going to have trial, the question is just when and what kind. And I want you to note that the word fall is not the word for an accident. It's the word for an encounter. It's not the idea of stumbling into a trial. It's the idea of something that is all part of an overall plan that you have an encounter with. So we have an idea under God's purpose for trials, what the word trial means.

Now, he gives us a threefold purpose for trial. He says, number one, it should produce joy. Verse two, "my brethren, count it all joy when you fall into many colored trials." Are you a joyful Christian or are you an unhappy Christian? Are you a positive Christian or are you a negative Christian? Are you a Christian who is always looking on the bad side of life and critical of people, are you just caught up in those who are given to criticism? Are you the kind of an individual when you get around a group of people who suddenly become very critical, you feel almost dirty and you'd like to get out of there just as fast as you can? Only you can answer that because we have two kinds.

We do have the joyful, positive Christian who is used of God, who is mature, who goes on to have an impact on the world. And we have those other Christian who are always negative. They can always tear down. They're always critical. And really, they have very little impact for the cause of Jesus Christ. In fact, they cause great harm for His work and for His glory. You know what's interesting though, that James says that the difficulties and the trials should produce the joy.

Now you would think that the joyful Christian would be the person who never has any difficulty. And someone could look at him like Satan looked at Job and said, well, God, no wonder he serves You. No wonder he is on top of things. Look at all of his money. Look at his family, look at his prestige. Everything's going great for him. God said, okay, you can take everything but his life. Some of you're studying job in the Sunday school class. Fascinating study. But the point is that God wants to take the trials and the troubles and the difficulties and the encounters of life and produce joy in our lives.

Second thing He wants to produce, his purpose is not only to produce joy, but it's to produce patience. Verse three, "Knowing this, that the trials, the trying of your faith worketh patience." Now we better find out what patience mean. The word patience does not mean something that is passive.

We usually think of the patient person as someone, when everything is going wrong, he just passively sits there and waits for it all to blow over. That's not the word. It is the word that has to do with an unswerving consistency. It's the word that has to do with fortitude. A biblical patience is a stick-to-it-iveness. It's not just sitting there, letting it all blow over, but it's looking at all these trials and just making you more secure in your faith. Instead of shattering your faith, it makes it stable. And it makes you stable as a believer. And when the trials come, you look at those things and you say, this is going to make me go on. I will not quit. You ever heard that before?

I hope when you leave Cedarville College, you get to your senior year and you go through graduation and you will say, praise the Lord, at least I won't have to hear President Dixon say, take quit out of your vocabulary again. I hope you get sick of it because I know that 10 years after you graduate, you'll look

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back and say, praise the Lord, I heard it. Fortitude, stick-to-it-iveness. Instead of suddenly facing something you never thought you would have to have to face and throwing in the towel, it makes you stronger and you move on. That's what James says a trial should produce.

And then number three, he says it should produce perfection. Should produce joy. That's God's purpose for a trial. God's purpose is to give us patience. And then God's purpose is to make us perfect. "Let patience," verse four, "have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." And the word for perfect is the word for full grown. Doesn't mean without sin, mature, has to do with the maturity of a scholar, fit for God's task in the world. It's interesting that the word entire means perfect in every part. Isn't that good? God allows different trials because He knows there are different parts of our personalities and of our Christian lives that need maturing. And God says, that's one of the things I'm doing. I'm allowing trials to come into your life so that you can grow up spiritually.

And may I say this? And I think you young people know this, I never, never would approach college young people and talk down to you. I respect you as maturing adults. And when I talk about maturing, I'm not just talking about you growing up and becoming a few years older. I'm talking about the faculty and the staff and the administrators, and I'm talking about Paul Dixon. I need to be maturing. I need to grow up. There's certain areas of my life and God allows the trials to come to work on all of us. Sometimes as parents, we think if I could just save my child from that, that I had to go through, then I'm really demonstrating my love and I'm helping him.

I'm reminded of the story I read of the man who watched a butterfly as it was trying to come out of a cocoon. And as it was trying to break out of that silk cocoon, it was struggling and just having a very difficult time. And so he thought I will help. And he pulled a knife out of his pocket and he went over and he carefully slit the cocoon and the butterfly came out, tried to make it in the air and then just dropped to the ground and died. You see, what the man didn't realize is that part of the struggle of getting out of the cocoon would mean the survival, the maturity of the butterfly. And if we don't go through the trials and the struggles, we'll never be able to be mature, growing, useful Christians.

This morning, I was reading in the newspaper and saw something interesting on the financial pages. It had to do with an article on finances that said, linguistic scholars note that the Chinese characters for crisis and opportunity are the very same. The trials that come into your life, will it be a crisis or will it be an opportunity? Show your faith in the warfare. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for this time together today. Thank You for Your word, for what You're going to do through us and for us because of what James wrote and what You inspired him to write, as we zero in on it in the dormitories and chapel, where we might be, change our lives, help us to face the trials of life, help us to grow up. In Jesus' name. Amen. Have a good day.