

Place: Lurgan Baptist 22:11:2016

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: James 1:1-4

60. THE BOOK OF JAMES

I am sure that James would have listened with something like glee to the old African American preacher who said, “*My brethren there be two sides to the gospel there is the believing side and there is the behaving side.*” The book of James deals with the latter for James is the most intensely practical book of the New Testament. This is a practical book dealing with every-day life for the man in the street. Yet it is not devoid of doctrine for in this book as Alan Cairns reminds us we have a four- fold revelation of God. (1:17 3:9 4:12 5:4) A three-fold revelation of Christ (2:7 1:1 2:1 5:9) a well developed doctrine of Scripture (1:18-25) and a definite doctrine of salvation. (1:18 2:14-26) Yet this letter was not written for the purpose of establishing the doctrines of the faith. It is simply a practical book. This is no nonsense Christianity for daily life, where the rubber hits the road.

I student on one occasion was asked to name his favourite translation of the Bible. Do you know what he replied ?

“*My mother’s.*” The questioner continued, “*Is that a translation into English ?*” “*No,*” he replied, “*it’s a translation into action.*” That in a nutshell is James great concern. His point is if you say you believe why do you act like you don’t ? My this book is a plea for reality

and is that not what we need today ? Many of us are long theory but short on practice, many of us hear the Word but few of us do it. Many of us profess but few of us practice. Now in order for us to get a handle on the book notice a few things by way of introduction.

1. The Position that James Adopts:

James. Let’s stop there. For three prominent men are named James in the New Testament. *There was James the son of Zebedee and brother of John.* A fisherman by trade he was the first of the disciples to give his life for Christ martyred by Herod in A.D. 44, (Acts 12:1-2) *Then there was James the son of Alphaeus and he was another one of the disciples* (Matt 10:3 Acts 1:13) *Finally, there was James our Lord’s half-brother born and raised in the same family.* (Matt 13:55 Mk 6:3 Gal 1:19) This James was the full brother of Jude who wrote the book of Jude. Do you recall that James was an unbeliever prior to the resurrection ? (Jn 7:5) But then the Risen Lord appeared to him and dispelled all his former doubts. (1 Cor 15:7) We then see him with the believers in the Upper Room (Acts 1:14) He became the key leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17 15:13 21:18 Gal 2:12) being called one of the “*pillars,*” of that church along with Peter and John.

Now it’s generally accepted that this James wrote this book around A.D. 44-49 making it the earliest written book in the New Testament. Now do you see how James opens this letter ? “*James a servant of God ...,*” (1:1) He did not say, “*James, the leader of the church in*

Jerusalem,” (Acts 21:18) nor “ *James, the Lord’s brother.*” (Gal 1:19) No, unlike some 21st century preachers who are always name-dropping he simply says, “ *James a servant of God.*” Someone has said, “ *The great man never thinks he is great and the small man never thinks he is small.*” “ *James a servant of God.*” It means he was utterly pledged to His Master. (Ex 21:6) not only in life but in death. You see, James came to a tragic but glorious end. For the Jewish leaders captured “ *James the Just,*” took him to the pinnacle of the temple where the devil had tempted Christ. (Lk 4:9) They said, “ *Now blaspheme Christ or we will throw you off.*” They threw him off but the fall didn’t kill him and he managed to stumble to his knees to pray for his murderers. He cried “ *Father forgive them for they don’t what they do.*” The crowd cried out “ *James the Just is praying for us,*” so they finished the job by stoning him to death and James joined the roll call of the martyrs. (A.D. 62)

Tradition has it that when his fellow disciples came to pick up his body and give him a decent burial they were astonished because for the very first time they saw his knee’s which looked like the knees of a camel. Here was a man who spent more time on his knees than on his feet. 1.

2. The Person that James Acclaims:

Do you see how high James lifts His Saviour ? “ *a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,*” do you see how James describes Him ? There’s a tendency in our day just to refer to Him as “ *Jesus,*” but James gives Him His title and so should we, “ *the Lord Jesus Christ,*” indeed the

Master Himself said “ *ye call me Master and Lord and ye say well.*” (Jn 13:13) Was it not James desire to uplift the Saviour ? A young preacher was once given some advice by a mature Christian of many years experience. It was this, “ *Yong man whenever you preach be sure that you do two things. Lift the Saviour high and lay the sinner low.*” Is this your desire ?

3. The People that James Addresses:

“ *To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad,*” (1:1) “ *The twelve tribes,*” can only mean the people of Israel the Jewish nation. (Matt 19:28 Acts 26:7 Rev 7:4) You see, James sent this letter to Christian Jews. The word “ *scattered,*” here means “ *in the dispersion,*” and it was used to mean Jews living outside the land of Palestine but who kept in contact with their “ *fatherland,*” returning home for the feasts when possible. He is writing to Christian Jews who have been dispersed, to those who have had to leave their homes, their job, their property. Do you recall at Stephen’s death there was “ *a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem and they were all scattered abroad ?*” (Acts 8:1 A.D. 31-34) Do you recall the persecution under Herod Agrippa the First ? “ *Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church ?*” (Acts 12:1)

Christian Jews were scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Being Jews they would be rejected by the Gentiles and being Christian Jews they would be rejected by their own countrymen. So you can see that this letter

has a very Jewish emphasis. It belongs to the period before the inclusion of Gentiles into the church, when the whole church was Jewish and when their meeting places still bore the designation “ *synagogues.*” (2:2) 1:2:3:

4. The Problems that James Acknowledges:

Basically these Jewish believers had to face two main problems. Persecution from outside the fellowship and problems within the fellowship. You think you have problems, do you see what these folk had to deal with ? The problem of trials, of temptations, the problem of being partial, the problem of worldliness, the problem of the tongue, the problem of competing as teachers within the assembly. I tell you the matters that James deals with here are so relevant for us today. 1:2:3:4: what about,

5. The Point that James Accentuates:

The point that “ *faith without works is dead,*” (2:26) There was a song that was popular some years ago, and it was entitled “ *Love and Marriage.*” Do you remember it ? “ *Love and marriage, love and marriage, go together like a horse and carriage.*” And on it went concluding in the final verse with the words, “ *You can’t have one without the other.*” Now faith and works go together like a horse and carriage also. You see, you can’t have one without the other. Dissolve the partnership and faith dies. For faith was never designed to dwell alone, separate from the partner that proves its existence. Someone has said that faith is like calories, you can’t see them but you can always see their results. And that is the major theme

resonating throughout James’s letter results. Of course to Martin Luther whose battle cry in the Reformation was “ *Justification by faith alone,*” James battle cry of “ *justification by works,*” was blatant heresy. But is it really ? I think that the faith and works dispute arises when people fail to make a distinction between the requirement for salvation and the result of salvation. Good works are not the requirement but they are certainly the result. *Paul stresses the Root of salvation which is faith in Christ, plus nothing, but James stresses the Fruit after salvation.* Paul sees the fire in the fireplace, but James eyes the smoke coming out of the chimney. So James whole thrust is, “ *you can’t have one without the other,*” for genuine faith produces genuine results. If you say you’ve come to know the Lord then that should be reflected by your life. Let’s see how James develops this theme through his letter.

1. FAITH & THE CHRISTIAN’S WALK CH 1

Do you recall the words of Hebrews ? “ *Without faith it is impossible to please God,*” (Heb 11:6) Faith is the channel by which all of God’s blessings come to us. (Rom 14:23) And the reality of a man’s faith always finds a definite counterpart in his life and conduct. Now in (Ch 1) faith is being tested. James talks about

(a) TRIALS ON THE OUTSIDE: 1:1-12

The Greek word for “ *temptations,*” in (1:2) means “ *testings or trial’s.*” It indicates trouble, something that breaks the pattern of peace, comfort joy and happiness in

someone's life. It conveys the idea “ *to put someone or something to the test.*” Now remember James is writing this letter to Jewish Christians who had been dispersed during the first century (Acts 12:1) Rich men dragged these poor Jewish Christians before the court and blasphemed the name of the Lord Jesus by which they were called. (2:6-7) Wealthy landowners employed them to reap their fields and then defrauded them of their rightful wages. Men had lost their jobs. Women were at their wit's end and James says “ *Count it all joy,*” (1:2) You say, “ *Preacher it is hard to have joy when you are going through a trial.*” I agree. Most of us would say that it's a joy when we escape trials not a joy when we encounter trials. But the word “ *count,*” here means “ *to look ahead.*” Looking ahead at what ? At the end result of our trials. Its finding joy in what the trials produce. Well, James uses the word “ *perfect,*” twice in (1:4) It's a word that means “ *complete, full grown.*” He is talking about spiritual maturity. The thought conveyed is that of a mature complete Christian, “ *conformed to the image of His Son.*” (Rom 8:29)

Often in our trials we do not understand God's purpose and sometimes Satan tempts us to ask “ *does the Lord really care ?*” This is when we need to pray for wisdom. You see, wisdom helps us to understand how to use these circumstances for our good and God's glory. A gifted secretary of a pastor was going through great trials. She had a stroke, her husband had gone blind, and then he had been taken to hospital where he was not expected to live. On Sunday morning in church the pastor assured her of his prayers. But she shocked him when she said, “ *Pastor,*

what are you asking God to do ?” “ *I'm asking God to help and strengthen you,*” he replied. “ *I appreciate that,*” she said “ *But pray about one thing more. Pray that I will have wisdom not to waste all of this.*” Are you in the midst of stressful trials ? Do you realize that this is how God makes your faith grow ? Are you praying for wisdom to discern His ways ? (a) and then,

(b) TEMPTATIONS ON THE INSIDE: 1:13-27

You see having dealt with external trials James now turns to internal temptations. Now remember there is a difference between the two. *Temptations are sent by Satan to make the Christian Stumble, trials are sent by God to make the Christian Stand. In Testing you, God is aiming at your Maturity, in Tempting you Satan is aiming at your Misery.* God always tests to bring out the best, but Satan always tempts to bring out the worst. In (1:2) James is using the word “ *trial,*” to mean “ *external trial,*” but here in (1:13) he is using the word “ *tempted,*” to mean “ *internal temptation.*” It was the late Guy King who said, “ *temptation is when you're asked to do it, sin is when you do it.*” Now when we think of sin we think of it as a single act but God sees it as a process. James describes the “ *birth,*” of sin enticement from without generates lust from within, lust conceives and gives birth to sin and sin brings death. Do you see those words “ *drawn away enticed,*” ? They're taken from the world of fishing.

For the fisherman uses bait to lure the prey. Sometimes he will use the fly, or the worm, of the silver spinner on the

hook. The fish are attracted by the bait, swim towards it open their mouths and are on dry land before they can change their minds. Is this not the same with us ? Sin never starts with the bait, it always starts with the desire. Do you recall King David ? His sin with Bathsheba came about because of his internal desire to play outside the boundaries of God. David was out of God's will, he was in the palace when as the Bible says it was “ *the time when kings go off to war.*” (2 Sam 11:1) So what happened ? Satan baited the hook with an external force. Her name was Bathsheba. And David took the bait. Tell me, is Satan dangling a bait in front of you ? What's her name, his name ? Are you allowing your desires to get out of line with God's desires ? Do you know what will sustain you in the hour of trial and strengthen you in moment of temptation ? The Word of God. Here James tells us as God's people we should *Hear the Word*: (1:19-20) *Receive the Word*: (1:21) and *Obey the Word*: (1:22) I suppose we could write over this section, “ ***The Christian and his Bible.***”

My do you want to walk with the Lord ? Well, how much time do you spend in your Bible ? (1:21) John Bunyan said, “ *I was never out of my Bible.*” John Wesley said, “ *I am a man of one book.*” Are you ? Can you say “ *Oh how I love thy law it is my meditation all the day.*” (Ps 119:97) (1)

(2) FAITH & THE CHRISTIAN'S WORSHIP CH 2

In (2:2) the Greek word translated “ *assembly*,” is the word for “ *synagogue*,” showing us again how Jewish this

letter is. You see, James here is talking about worship. He is speaking about,

(a) FAITH AND LOVE: 2:1-13

He is saying that faith is proved by love. Look at (2:1) The Amplified Bible puts it like this, “ *Do not attempt hold and practice the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory together with snobbery.*” It was raising its head then and its raises its head now. Someone has said there are at least five areas where we as believers can be tempted to discriminate. *We can discriminate on the basis of appearance, ancestry, age, achievement and affluence.* Now let's try and get the picture here. Imagine you're the usher at a worship service and in walk two men. *Mr. Have followed by Mr. Have-Not.* The first is wearing a five hundred pound suit, he's been to some fancy shop in Lurgan, the other man comes in wearing clothes from War and Want. You're enamoured with outward appearance and so you escort the rich man to the best seat and you say to the poor man, “ *Go and stand over there out of the way.*” Now the real problem is not finding a good seat for the rich man but in ignoring the poor man. My are we guilty of this sort of thing ? Do you look down your nose at some other believers because you think you're better off ?

Are you indifferent to some because of their poor position ? Because of their unattractive outward appearance ? If so we are guilty of breaking “ *the royal law*,” (2:8) which is the law of love. (Lev 19:18,34 Matt 22:34-40 Gal 5:14) Do you know something ? We need

to see everyone through the eyes of Christ. Is that how you look on others ? By accepting them for what they are and seeing them as persons for whom Christ died ? (a)

(b) FAITH AND WORKS: 2:14-26

He is saying that faith is proved by works. Now as we have said already this section of James has caused some undue concern among Christians. Does James contradict Paul on the question of justification by faith alone ? Well, it would be hard for him to do this for at the time James wrote A.D. 44-49 Paul had yet to finish the first line of his many letters. But there is no contradiction. *In the book of Romans Paul is explaining how the sinner is justified, given a right stand standing before God. In the book of James is explaining how the saved person proves that salvation before others.* You see, a sinner is saved by faith without works but true saving faith leads to works. James names two Old Testament people to prove his point. Lets take the first one Abraham. Look at (2:21) “ *Was not Abraham*,” The question is when was Abraham justified ? Think about,

The Moment of His Justification:

When was he justified ? Well, look at (2:23) Now that is a direct quote from (Gen 15:6) You see, Abraham’s salvation experience is recorded in (Gen Ch 15) thirty years before this incident on Mount Moriah, thirty years before he offered up Isaac. God came to Abraham and told him he would have a son, that his seed would be as the stars in the heaven. Do you recall Abraham’s

response ? “ *And he believed in the Lord and He counted it to Him for righteousness.*” (Gen 15:16) Paul says exactly the same thing in (Rom 4:3) “ *Abraham believed in God and it was counted unto him for righteousness.*” He was justified by faith. Justification is that act of God in which He declares righteous the sinner who believes on Christ. It is not a process it is an act. It is not something the sinner does, it is something God does for the sinner when he trusts Christ. Now this was the moment of Abraham’s justification. But notice,

The Mark of Abraham’s Justification:

People who say that James contradicts Paul say that because they fail to see that James was not referring here to (Gen Ch 15) the moment Abraham exercised faith in God but rather to (Gen Ch 22) the moment Abraham offered up Isaac. *You see, the offering up of Isaac was not the moment of Abraham’s justification, but it was the mark of Abraham’s justification.* The Amplified Bible puts it like this “ *Was not Abraham our father shown to be justified by his works.*” In the words of Matthew Poole “ *Abraham’s justification was not the absolution of a sinner but the approbation of a saint.*” You see, the offering up of Isaac was the proof, the evidence, the sign that the faith he had exercised in (Gen 15) was real, saving faith. You see, a faith that does not produce works is dead and useless. Do you see (2:14) ? It ought to read “ *Can that kind of faith save him ?*” It was John Calvin who said “ *Faith alone saves but the faith that saves is not alone.*” What a word for our land. You see, this country is filled with folk who have signed a card, raised a hand,

joined a church, made a profession but let's face the challenge of God's Word "*show me thy faith.*" (2:18) Tell me, will your faith get you to heaven ? Is it a faith that works ? (1) (2)

(3) FAITH AND THE CHRISTIAN'S WORDS CH 3

You get the impression when you read James letter that the believers to whom he wrote were having serious problems with their tongues. Five times over in this short letter James brings this subject up. (1:19, 26 2:12 4:11 5:12) It seems evident that what Matthew Henry calls "*the sins of the tongue,*" were rather prevalent among these Christians. Would James find them less common if he were to visit our churches today ? The Tongue. Medically, they say it's only a two or three inch slab of muscle, mucous and membrane and nerves that enable us to chew, taste and swallow. It's also the major organ of communication that enables us to articulate distinct sounds so that we can understand each other. How vital this strange muscle in our mouth, but how volatile as well. It was Washington Irving who said, "*A sharp tongue is the only edge tool that grows keener with constant use.*" It was James who said "*the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity.*" (3:6) No wonder he begins this chapter with,

(a) *THE EXHORTATION: 3:1-2*

Look at (3:1-2) The word "*masters,*" is teachers. Now James is not condemning the teaching ministry. But he is warning against clamouring for the position without carefully weighing the cost. You see, those of us who

teach the Word of God will be judged more strictly than most. Great privileges bring great responsibilities. (Lk 12:48) The writer to the Hebrews reminds us that pastors/elders are to be obeyed. Why ? "*For they watch for your souls as they that must give an account.*" (Heb 13:17) Of course all of us stumble in many ways especially in what we say. James sets before us here,

(b) *THE EXPLANATION: 3:3-12*

He explains to us how the tongue works. He tells us that the tongue has,

Power to Direct: the Bit and Rudder: (3:3-4) The word "*helm,*" in (3:4) is rudder. You see, a horse is controlled by reins and a ship is controlled by a rudder. I think of young folk who don't know the way to go but a "*bit,*" of word from you and me could set the direction of their lives for God and good. I think of the older generation so many of them battling across life's ocean often "*driven of fierce winds,*" sometimes not knowing where to find a haven of peace. Are such people near you ? Are you willing to be a Barnabas to them ?

Power to Destroy: The Fire and the Animal: (3:5-8) Do you know that your words can start fires ? (Prov 26:20-22) Did you know your tongue is like a wild beast that cannot be tamed ?

Power to Delight: The Fountain and the Tree: (3:9-12) It's impossible for fountain to produce both fresh water and salt, likewise a tree cannot bear two kinds of fruit.

Yet how often we speak with forked tongues.
(Matt 15:18) Do you see how inconsistent we are ?
James concludes this chapter with,

(c) *THE EXPRESSION: 3:13-18*

He compares the critical tongue and the controlled tongue by the wisdom they express. *The critical tongue is worldly wise in its expression, while the controlled tongue is heavenly wise in its expression.* An Egyptian king named Amasis once sent a sacrifice to his god and asked the priest to send back the best and worst part of the animal. The priest sent back the tongue, which organ said he represented both demands. (Ps 19:14) (1) (2) (3)

(4) FAITH & THE CHRISTIAN'S WARFARE CH 4

Franklin Roosevelt once said, “ *there is nothing I love so much as a good fight.*” Fighting is something that comes to us naturally. Why ? Because we are each born with a scrappy nature that prefers going for the jugular than giving in. Now it's evident that these Christians were fighting and squabbling among themselves. James speaks here of,

(a) *THE SPIRITUAL WAR: 4:1-12*

There was War on a Relational Level: The Amplified Bible puts it like this, “ *what leads to strife and how do conflicts originate among you ?*” Among who ? Among Christians. You see, there was Social Rivalry: between rich and poor. There was Ecclesiastical Jealousy: (3:1)

there was Personal Enmity: (4:11) It seems these Christians were speaking evil of one another. There was War on an Internal Level: Look at (4:1) You see, the war in the heart is helping to cause the wars in the church. My we are at war with each other, because we are at war with ourselves. Do you see the root of the problem ? “ *Your lusts,*” “ *Your desires,*” “ *Your selfish satisfaction.*” Is this not the essence of sin ? Selfishness. (Is 53:6) There was War on a Vertical Level: how does a Christian declare war on God ? By being friendly with God's enemies. And they are all here. In (4:1) you have got the flesh, in (4:4) you have got the world, and in (4:7) you have got the devil. My if you live for the world and the flesh you'll become proud and the devil will take advantage of you, for pride is one of his chief tools. How can we overcome ? With,

(b) *THE SUBMISSIVE WILL: 4:13-17*

We need to Acknowledge the Priority of God: “ *Submit yourselves therefore to God,*” it was a military term speaking of someone getting into his proper rank. My have you put yourself under the Lordship of Christ ? We need to Acknowledge the Presence of God: “ *Draw nigh,*” (4:8) For if we are going to be victorious in the battle we need utilise all the resources that God puts at our disposal. We need to Acknowledge the Prerogative of God: and stamp “ **D.V.**” over all our plans, hopes and aspirations. Do you do that ? Do you bring the Lord into your plans ? Is He Lord in every area of your life ? (1) (2) (3) (4)

(5) FAITH & AND THE CHRISTIAN'S WAITING

CH 5

For the key thought in this last chapter seems to be the second coming of Christ (5:7-9) and how we are to live in the light of it. James says,

(a) BE HOPEFUL: 5:1-11

Against the sins of the rich which he mentions as hoarding, (5:1-3) stealing (5:4) and killing (5:6) James encourages these believers to get their eyes on the coming of the Lord. (5:7) James was saying “ *Don’t let momentary stumbles beset you, look up and be calm.*”

“ *Be patient unto the coming of the Lord.*” Isn’t the coming of Christ both comforting and challenging ? (5:8-9) Comforting because we shall see Christ, challenging because He will search us at the Judgment Seat. (5:9)

(b) BE TRUTHFUL: 5:12

I don’t think James is forbidding the taking of oaths in an court of law (Matt 26:63-64) he is simply saying that the Christian must always keep his word.

(c) BE PRAYERFUL: 5:13-18

And that prayer is to be corporate (5:14) dependent (5:15) powerful (5:16) and exemplary (5:17) Elijah was remembered for the power of his prayer life will we be ? James was remembered for the regularity of his prayer life will we be ?

(d) BE FAITHFUL: 5:19-20

I mean it’s so easy to be wrapped up in our trials that we forget the needs of the lost and of Christians who have strayed. The word “ *err*,” means “ *to wander*.” (Matt 18:12) “ *Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.*”

My do you know by experience what I am talking about ? Have you wandered away from the Lord ? Do you know someone who has ? They once sat with us at the Lord’s Table, they once stood with us in the Open Air, they once knelt with us at the throne of grace ? But where are they today ? Do you see that “ *convert*,” ? It means “ *to turn back*.” Do you know something ? That is our responsibility. The word “ *one*,” means “ *someone*.” James is saying that we have been given the ministry of restoration. Now that is the basic interpretation, but we can apply to the lost. After all if an erring brother needs to be restored, how much more does a lost sinner to be saved. My the sandglass of prophecy is running out. The coming of the Lord draweth nigh. But what about our unsaved family ? Do we need to pray afresh ?

***Oh give us all a passion
For souls as ne’er before
To warn men and to tell them
The Judge is at the door***

