

August 2, 2020

Lesson 9

FAITH AND WISDOM

ADULT/YOUTH

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Ask for It
YOUTH TOPIC: The Pursuit of Wisdom

CHILDREN

GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Faith and Wisdom
CHILDREN'S TOPIC: Believe and Know

DEVOTIONAL READING
Isaiah 40:1-8

ADULT/YOUTH

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: James 1:1-11
PRINT PASSAGE: James 1:1-11
KEY VERSE: James 1:5

CHILDREN

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: James 1:1-11
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James 1:1-11—KJV

JAMES, A servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

8 A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

9 Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:

James 1:1-11—NIV

JAMES, A servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

6 But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

7 That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

8 Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

9 Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position.

10 But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

11 For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

10 But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower.

11 For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People desire to be seen as wise. What is the source of wisdom? The letter written by James affirms that God gives wisdom generously and ungrudgingly to those who ask in faith.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Consider the relationship between wisdom and perseverance through trials.
2. Affirm the value of trials and hardships in making one a wiser and more productive disciple.
3. Pray for godly wisdom by which to endure life's trials and temptations.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

- Most likely the “James” who wrote this book is “James, the Lord’s brother” (see Galatians 1:19).
- Verse 2 represents the first of fourteen times that James addresses his readers as “brothers” (or “brothers and sisters”; Greek: *adelphoi*). See 1:16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14; 3:1, 10, 12; 4:11; 5:7, 10, 12, 19 (except the NRSV does not translate *adelphoi* in 1:16, 19; 5:7, 10, 12).
- James’s perspective on trials’ producing character echoes that of Paul’s (see Romans 5:3) and of Peter’s (see 1 Peter 1:6).
- The description “double-minded” is unique in the New Testament and ancient Greek

literature. Some biblical scholars believe that James coined the term.

- Verses 9 and 10 reflect Jesus’ warnings about the difficulty (impossibility) of the rich to be saved as well as the concept of the first being last and the last first (cf. Matthew 19:23-30).

Teachers of CHILDREN

- Suffering is a test of one’s faith.
- Tests develop perseverance, thus enabling one to mature.
- True wisdom comes from God and is available to all who seek it without doubting.
- Although God wants to supply what we lack, we must pray to God confidently with expectation.
- True wisdom differs from secular knowledge.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

This book is considered by many to be part of the Wisdom Literature of the Bible. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, James was martyred in approximately AD 62, and his book is probably the oldest book of the New Testament, having been written as early as AD 45 before the first council of Jerusalem in AD 50. The teachings of James focus on the works that exemplified justification with God. He was writing to Jews to encourage them to continue growing in their newfound Christian faith. He constantly emphasizes that good actions will naturally flow from those who are filled with the Spirit and questions whether someone has a saving faith if the fruits of the Spirit are not evident in the person's life. Sixty obligations are presented in 108 verses of the book, and focus is placed on the truths of Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount.

James gives instructions for the Jews and those beyond the Jerusalem church. He charged them to stay connected to the body of Christ. James provides biblical methods for praying, having faith, controlling the tongue, pulling through suffering, connecting good works and salvation, chastising the rich, comforting the poor, showing how to rightfully apply wisdom, and learning the true nature of being a Christian. The purpose of this book is all-encompassing, with emphasis being placed on the Christian faith.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book is addressed to Jewish Christians scattered abroad and was written primarily to the Jews who had been dispersed throughout the Roman Empire during a time of intense persecution (see James 1:1). The book makes no mention of any Gentile controversy and thus was probably written before that controversy broke out and the Jewish church came to be divided between the faithful and

the Judaizers. It is believed that the book was written early before AD 49. The book of James outlines that good works come through genuine religion, genuine faith, and genuine wisdom. The information contained in this book of the Bible is reflected in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7. The first chapter of this book begins with a description of the general traits of a believer's walk in faith. Subsequent chapters of this book discuss social injustice and faith in action. Also, the comparison is made between worldly and godly wisdom, and admonition is given to desist from evil and draw closer to God. The concluding part of this book encourages believers to pray fervently, be patient in suffering, and care for one another, while supporting their faith through fellowship.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

James: James the Just was an early leader of the Jerusalem church of the apostolic age, of which Paul was also affiliated. He was the half-brother of Jesus, being one of the sons of Mary and Joseph. Although he grew up in the same house with Jesus of Nazareth, he was not a believer for the earlier part of his life. He taught about faith and sought to establish that true faith is demonstrated by what believers are, how they live, and what they do.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Complete (verse 4)—Greek: *holokléros* (hol'-ok'-lay-ros): complete in every part; sound; perfect; "entire" (KJV).

Greeting(s) (verse 1)—Greek: *chairó* (khah'-ee-ro): to rejoice, be glad; salutation(s); send greeting(s); "God speed."

Joy (verse 2)—Greek: *chara* (khar-ah'): gladness; delight.

Servant (verse 1)—Greek: *doulos* (doo'-los): a slave; someone who belongs to another.

Testing (verse 3)—Greek: *dokimion* (do-kē-mē-on): to test; that by which something is tried or proved; "trying" (KJV).

Trials (verse 2)—Greek: *peirasmos* (pi-ras-mos’): experiments; “temptations” (KJV).

Wisdom (verse 5)—Greek: *sophia* (sof-ee’-ah): insight; skill (human or divine); intelligence.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

- A. Deeds, Not Words
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

- A. Tested Faith
(James 1:1-4)
- B. Double-mindedness
(James 1:5-8)
- C. Fading Wealth
(James 1:9-11)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Deeds, Not Words

The book of James was written by the servant of God to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion—that is, to Jewish Christians who do not live in the Jewish homeland in Palestine. It is the first of a group of letters that were addressed to Christians in general rather than to a particular church (as seen in most of Paul’s letters). James reminds us in his book that there is an urgent need for Christian standards and values to be evident in all of life. Deeds, not simply words, are the focus and primary message of this book. The entirety of this book admonishes believers to stand firm amid adversities, trials, and tribulations. James advises readers not to doubt God, irrespective of the happenings in their lives. The specific Bible text of James 1:1-11 teaches believers to count it as joy when their faith is tested through tribulation and to continually seek wisdom in all their doing.

B. Biblical Background

James has its background in the Jewish Christian communities in the Roman Empire. This particular text introduces James, the half-brother of Jesus. He is devoted to the mission of Christ, charges believers to hold their ground, admonishes the rich on how to conduct themselves, and advises those that lack knowledge to seek from the giver of knowledge. This text teaches that faith will be tested, but perseverance is necessary for triumph.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Tested Faith

(James 1:1-4)

JAMES, A servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers

temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

James refers to himself as a servant of God

and Christ (verse 1). The term *servant* actually means “slave.” A *slave* is one who has been bought with a price (see 1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23). This is the same term used in 2 Peter 1:1 and by Paul in Romans 1:15 and Titus 1:1. The content of the letter is directed toward the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad in the Jewish diaspora. The number “twelve” features prominently in the Bible. In terms of biblical numerology, the number “twelve” is a symbol of faith, a symbol of the church, and a symbol of divine rule. The Old Testament book of Genesis states that there were twelve sons of Jacob, and those twelve sons formed the twelve tribes of Israel. The New Testament also tells us that Jesus had twelve apostles.

The specific type of temptation mentioned in verse 2 refers not so much to fleshly attractions but more so to persecution, trials, and affliction. God does not tempt us, but God does test us in order for us to grow toward spiritual maturity. Temptations can lead us into sin, but testing can lead us into greater growth. Matthew 5:10 (NIV) declares, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The reason why testing can lead to joy is because if we pass the test, we are promoted. We are promoted to greater maturity—patience, endurance, wisdom, faith, and more. Even though the exam may have been difficult, the joy is experienced through the promotion.

When our faith is tested or tried (verse 3), there is a positive and productive yield. Trials and difficulties do not in themselves necessarily produce patience; it is in conjunction with faith and prayer that this result occurs. A similar perspective is found in Romans 5:3-5 (NIV), which contends, “Not only so, but we also

glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” Success in the spiritual life is a dynamic process, not a detached formula. The key to victory in life is to trust God and apply God’s principles even when we do not understand them. Rigorous physical exercise may initially feel painful to the human body, but in the long term the stimulation produces better circulation, muscle growth, endurance, and an increase in stamina, enabling us to accomplish greater challenges.

Verse 4 places patience or perseverance in an active, assertive role, rather than in a passive, dormant state. Waiting can be done in a winning way even before the outcome. Even in difficulty or loss we can reap a harvest of blessed growth if we sow in faith. Hebrews 12:1 (NIV) holds, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” The development of endurance requires great work, but it also yields great rewards. Instead of wanting problems and pain to be removed from our lives, our quest should be to have the wisdom to use our problems to propel us in the right direction. When we plant our faith in the soil of afflictions, we can produce a harvest of spiritual fruit that feeds a multitude. The power of God that resides inside can enable us to learn how to rejoice regardless of the state or situation in which we may find ourselves.

When patience and perseverance are perfected, that means that they are completed or fully developed. Underdeveloped patience will not suffice. Half-done perseverance is woefully inadequate. When we decide to endure the entire patience process, that decision and that act prepare us to powerfully prosper. Never waste a painful experience because it very well could have been prepared by God to build your patience and endurance.

B. Double-mindedness

(James 1:5-8)

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

If you were asked to identify the greatest aspect of Christian character in the lives of the average Christian, what would you say it was? Alexander Maclaren contends that the great deficiency in the average Christian's character is wisdom (verse 5). Wisdom is the principal thing. Knowledge is retaining information through education. But wisdom is the application of that knowledge to specific situations. To James, wisdom is the ability to properly discern how and when to refrain from or take a particular course of action, stance, or disposition. To be truly wise, then, is to think as God would think, speak as God would speak, and act as God would act.

The primacy of faith can never be overemphasized, as is highlighted in verse 6 and by Hebrews 11:6, which reads, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone

who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (NIV). We can never find favor *with* God without placing our faith *in* God. Whenever we make a request of God, it must be done with the right motive and in the right spirit if we are to expect an answer. A firm faith and a confident request tend to produce firm results and specific answers from God. One of the worst things we can do when we petition God is to ask in doubt. Doubt cancels faith, and we cut short our own blessings in the process. Waves that are driven by the wind are unstable, unsteady, and unpredictable. As we journey through the sometimes dark and unpredictable twists and turns of destiny, faith is the fire that must be ignited in order to illuminate the landscape of our lives.

A cut-and-dry case is presented in verse 7 for the necessity of faith. When operating under the auspices of the faith walk, nothing is impossible. But when one chooses to operate in doubt and fear, nothing is possible. Expectation creates the atmosphere for miracles to take place. Faith is the incubator for abundant living and for strongholds to be broken. Apologist C. S. Lewis once said, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." It is a common thing to hear someone say, "I'll believe it when I see it." But when it comes to a relationship with God, a more accurate statement would be, "I'll see it when I believe." We are called to trust God even when we cannot trace God. Before we can expect anything from God, God expects something from us and that something is simple childlike faith and trust in

God's ability to provide all our needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

The literal translation of the word *double-minded* (verse 8) is "double-souled." This is a condition of the human mind and heart in which part of one's loyalty and priority belongs to the flesh and the other part of one's loyalty and priority belongs to God. This is a toxic mix that causes a great number of problems and difficulties internally as well as externally. In such cases, complications can occur socially, emotionally, spiritually, and sometimes even physically. Matthew 6:24 tells us that "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (NIV). Therefore, in order to avoid a case of spiritual schizophrenia it is important to choose this day whom we will serve. Revelation 3:15-16 (NIV) further informs us, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth."

C. Fading Wealth

(James 1:9-11)

Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: but the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

Disciples of Jesus Christ live in what has been called an upside-down world (verse 9). In order to see and appreciate this, one need look no further than the apparent contradictions

in the life and statements of Jesus. On one hand, Jesus can make statements like, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Luke 9:58, NIV). On the other hand, this same Jesus can say in Matthew 26:53 (NIV), "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" Throughout the Bible, a high place is accorded to those who find themselves in a lowly condition. Matthew 6:19-23 (NIV) underscores this principle: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Those who are wealthy do not have to apologize for their wealth, but they can use their wealth for the glory of God (verse 10). In the midst of maintaining wealth to give away, those who give should do so with a humble attitude. If one displays an act of charity and that act is done in a prideful way, then the significance of the very act is compromised. Matthew 6:1-4 (NIV) underscores this principle: "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what

your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” One’s relative poverty or wealth is also a state of mind and depends on what one prioritizes and values in life.

Verse 11 is taken from Isaiah 40:8 (NIV): “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.” Although those who are rich may boast an attractive exterior, like a flower blossom, this outward beauty is rendered inconsequential without the inward anchor of a solid trust in and obedience to God. An old gospel song underscores this sentiment of verse 11 by encouraging us to build our hopes and dreams on things in life that are eternal. This is the way and the key to successfully hold on to God’s hand that does not change with the shifting tides of life.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Faith in God is the engine that drives our relationship with God. Without the motor, we are unable to get very far as disciples of Jesus

Christ. Our faith does not exist in a vacuum but will be tested from time to time in order to prove its contents. Like items and ornaments made of gold and silver, the only way to deliver a superior product is to expose it to the heat of difficulty. First Peter 1:6-7 acknowledges this notion: “In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (NIV). In order to experience maturity in Christ, we are challenged to find joy in the midst of trial and difficulty. Our relationship with God is deepened when we have confidence that God is producing character and perseverance in our lives despite the trials we may endure.

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for the opportunity to walk by faith and not by sight. Help us to see our pain and our difficulties as avenues toward greater power and strength. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(July 27–August 2, 2020)

Faith and Wisdom

MONDAY, July 27: “Suffering on Behalf of the Church” (Colossians 1:24-29)

TUESDAY, July 28: “Saved by God’s Mercy” (Titus 3:3-7)

WEDNESDAY, July 29: “Ask; God Will Supply Your Needs” (Luke 11:9-13)

THURSDAY, July 30: “Rejoice in Your Sufferings” (Romans 5:1-5)

FRIDAY, July 31: “God’s Loving Actions toward Sinners” (Romans 5:6-11)

SATURDAY, August 1: “Grass Withers but God’s Word Stands” (Isaiah 40:1-8)

SUNDAY, August 2: “Wisdom Overcomes Trials and Temptations” (James 1:1-11)