

Christ Community Covenant Church
Street Level Christianity: Street Faith for Trials
Pastor Dave Scherrer - October 4, 2015

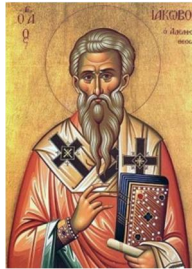
Pastoral prayer

Ricki & Kevin Granger, Savannah and Isabella, Norm Waugh and Lynn, John Johnson and Frances, comfort for Helen Hock in the death of her mother. Roseburg, Oregon Umpqua Community College.

Street Level Christianity Intro

To help us with this we are going to study the book of James for the fall of 2015. It would help us to know a little bit about the author and the audience.

According to the early church historians Eusebius and Jerome, James was named a bishop of Jerusalem by the apostles: "James, the brother of the Lord, to whom the episcopal seat at Jerusalem had been entrusted by the apostles". Jerome wrote the same: "James... after our Lord's passion ordained by the apostles bishop of Jerusalem..." and that James "ruled the church of Jerusalem thirty years". Tradition tells us that he was martyred in 62 AD by Jewish authorities.



The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* claims that James the Just was "from an early date with Peter a leader of the Church at Jerusalem and from the time when Peter left Jerusalem after Herod's attempt to kill him, James appears as the principal authority who presided at Council of Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 15+.

The epistle of James is generally attributed to the brother of Jesus. There is debate in this, especially as the Catholic Church holds to the understanding of the perpetual virginity of Mary the mother of Jesus. In protestant tradition there are identified 6 bothers and two sisters following the birth of Jesus, all step brothers of Jesus with Joseph as their father.

The Epistle of James is thought to have been written in a few years prior to the Jerusalem council held in 49 or 50 AD, so perhaps in 46 or 47 AD. That would make it the earliest book of the New Testament, the first to be circulated in the company of the very young church. It is written to Jews, especially Jews that had been dispersed across the Middle East during the time of very early persecution of the church by the Jewish authorities.

The burden of James' letter is to exhort us to consistent Christian living. He does this by dealing with many dangers which face us (problems which can lead us into sin) and by exhorting us to proper Christian virtues. One by one these issues are handled, and we are instructed in regard to them. The subjects which James takes up includes trials and suffering, empty faith, the unbridled tongue, worldly wisdom, injustice to name a few. Some call it the proverbs of the New Testament as there seems to be little organizational structure to the book. However the book is divided, it must be kept in mind that James' purpose is simply to exhort us in matters of daily Christian living. A kind of **Street Level Christianity**. And we will see that James gets right after it. So let's do that as well.

James 1:2-4

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

[My robe and stole - High order concerning the nature of the conversation of suffering]

List of sufferings . . . Recent shootings in Oregon, June 18, 2015 historic black church Charleston, SC, Fort Hood, Sandy Hook elementary. Here in our community there is the Aurora theater shootings, 2007 Life Fellowship in Colorado Springs and the YWAM shootings that happened just one mile from this location also in 2007.

[Savannah, no parent should experience the death of a child.]

%Mental pain is less dramatic than physical pain, but it is more common and also more hard to bear. The frequent attempt to conceal mental pain increases the burden: it is easier to say %My tooth is aching+than to say %My heart is broken.+

C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

%once read the sentence 'I lay awake all night with a toothache, thinking about the toothache and about lying awake.' That's true to life. Part of every misery is, so to speak, the misery's shadow or reflection: the fact that you don't merely suffer but have to keep on thinking about the fact that you suffer. I not only live each endless day in grief, but live each day thinking about living each day in grief.+

C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

Philosophers and people on the street agree that suffering and pain are the biggest stumbling blocks to coming to terms with a gracious and loving and all powerful God. As Christians, suffering comes with the territory, and there is a long line of sufferers in the Bible. James reminds us of that heritage of life as well as the purposes found in it . . .

James 5:7, 10-11

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.

¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

So what is this all about? Philosophers like Platingna and Hume take the lofty road, but we are going to take a street level look at suffering this morning. How are you and I to make sense of this pain in our lives? First I would suggest that God brings suffering into our lives for our very own sake.

God brings us suffering for my sake**James 1:2-4**

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Romans 5:3-5

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

It seems to me that there are three kinds of suffering

1. The suffering that comes when I am foolish
2. The suffering that comes when you are foolish or mean to me.

3. The suffering that comes from a fallen and broken world where our enemy the Devil has temporary authority

If I allow it, I can shift my perspective and use the pain and suffering to make me better, to spur me on to courageous and selfless acts of kindness and generosity . . . or I can drag back and cocoon, become bitter and mean, Scrooge like in my attitude toward others. Like no other phenomenon, pain, like the heat of a blast furnace, sifts the character of humanity into gold or dross.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18

⁷ For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.+
C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

God brings us suffering for others' sake

The suffering we each experience also gives us spiritual and emotional perspective and empathy so that we might comfort others in their afflictions.

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

My so called sufferings: Kristin's birth, kidney disease and transplant, Susan's brain hemorrhage, raising support and falling behind over 6 months wages owed to me, missionary move to NYC that had my daughter saying to me in tears for a year, saying "Why can't we move home", fired later in Denver YFC. My knees are shot and I have difficulty sleeping, I am blind in one eye and have arthritis in my hands and feet. Susan and I lost three parents in 6 months and I have broken twelve bones including my back once and my ribs three times. I have been swindled out of money and I have had not just one but two dachshunds as pets. Now compared to Paul's list of shipwrecks and stonings and flogging, I don't have much to complain about!

And, like Paul, I don't share this to brag. My life has been a wonderful life of marriage to Susan, my family, and many wonderful years of ministry. But Susan and I have seen our share of trial and suffering and in that we have a perspective and experience that allows us to care deeply for others and to perhaps offer a comfort that also has a certain authority.

I cannot identify with the death of a child or the death of a spouse and I do not know the suffering of the saints in the persecuted church. These trials are beyond my authority, though many of you here in this room have this higher authority of suffering. May God have mercy on us and may we comfort one another in our standing up in the face of the relentlessness of life and its trials. Finally God allows suffering for Jesus' sake . . .

God brings us suffering for Jesus' sake

1 Peter 2:21

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

Philippians 1:29

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him **but also suffer for his sake,**

When we suffer well, when we claim the suffering and the comfort of Christ and He receives the Glory for our praises then we become a sacrifice of praise for our God.

Learning joy in the darkness

James 1:2

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

The promise is that in the world you will have tribulations, but Jesus also promised that we should take heart, because He has overcome the world. He also promised to never leave us or forsake us.

Isaiah 43:2

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

Count it all joy . . .

Acts 5:41

So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.

"The Son of God suffered unto the death, not that men might not suffer, but that their sufferings might be like His." ~ George MacDonald

Communion

Benediction

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge-
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In His arms He'll take and shield thee,
Thou wilt find a solace there.