

JAMES Introduction

Anyone ever felt the need for Wisdom? For yourself or for a loved one?

When we think of wisdom we typically think of some insight that will tell us how to make the “correct” decision at a given moment. We’re really wanting some sort of a spiritual crystal ball that will give us the answers we’re looking for in life.

I hate to disappoint you, but that’s not really what biblical Wisdom is all about. It may be helpful in those moments, but wisdom is more than that.

In the Bible wisdom is character, it is the skill of living a godly life in a world beset with temptations to sin of every kind. Dr. Rayburn

Wisdom books are instruction in the nuts and bolts of a godly life and of God-honoring behavior. Someone has said that wisdom concerns those life lessons that are too fine to be caught in the mesh of the law.

Today we’re starting a series on the Book of James and I have a early apology.

This morning is going to be more of an overview to set the stage for the book. I apologize if it seems too wonky, but James start off fast with a gut punch in v. 1-2

1 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.

2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials

That deserves to be dealt with by itself apart from the introductory background material. So come back next week for more details on v. 2

If you’re familiar with the book you know that it resembles much of the OT wisdom literature.

Listen to this from J.I. Packer...

“Of the five wisdom books of the Old Testament, it has been classically said that the Psalms will teach you how to pray, Proverbs how to live, Job how to suffer, the Song how to love, and Ecclesiastes how to enjoy. That dictum seems to me wonderfully insightful, and it is totally reinforced by James, the New Testament writer, who speaks to all these themes most forcefully within his five brief chapters.” [Truth and Power, 153]

Wisdom literature, in the OT and in James, rarely deals with the aspects of Israel’s theological foundation. The themes of Exodus, redemption, sacrifices, the priesthood, The Temple, and atonement are basically absent from the wisdom literature. So too with James. There are no long theological arguments that are developed as in Romans or Ephesians. There is no discussion of the incarnation, the virgin birth, or the suffering and death of Christ, the cross, or even his resurrection. The name of Jesus appears only twice.

For some, the first thought of James is “Isn’t that the book that Martin Luther called an epistle of straw”? He thought it was too focused on a law style of living, but he was not completely opposed to it being in the NT.. James doesn’t develop the doctrines of justification by faith, but he does deal with the nitty gritty of sanctification – the process of living out the Christian life. James is the Gospel in Real Life.

To get an overview we're going to watch The BIBLE PROJECT VIDEO ; (sit back and get your popcorn)

The original audience of Jewish believers in Jesus, who had been dispersed because of persecution, faced all sorts of trying times. Like all believers they faced issues of angry tongues, love of money, favoritism, the need for wisdom, being thin skinned and easily offended while ignoring their own sins against others, and being eager to set the agenda to control their lives. James speaks to these issues.

The one who wrote James- the brother of Christ WAS one of 4 pillars of early church Paul, Peter, John and James,
James was younger brother of Jesus, calls himself the servant of God.
He refers to Lord Jesus Christ kurios>> = Yahweh. Christians wouldn't use title "Cesar kurios" because the word is full of idea of deity, but they certainly referred to Christ as Lord. As a result they were objects of persecution for religious and political reasons.

James shared life with Jesus AND STILL affirms his deity. Think of how hard that would be.
Imagine the "tell all" book James could have written. If he had the dirt on Jesus he could have gone on CNN or Entertainment Tonight or sold his story to NY TIMES, Washington Post, Time, Newsweek, USA Today or the National Enquirer (inquiring minds want to know)
EX: Think of relatives who write exposes on famous people.

At first his own people didn't believe Jesus.

20And He came home, and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. **21**When His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses." Mark 3

We often fail to honor those in our family the way others do ("he's not so special. we're in the same family") but 1 Cor 15 says Jesus came to James v. 7 "He appeared to more than 500, to James, and to the disciples"

Jesus the true elder brother comes to James and brings him into the fold of believers.

THE LITTLE BROTHER sees all of your faults, but James saw the resurrected Christ and is now his bond servant. The quality of Jesus' life must have been outstanding to get this testimony from his own brother.

"There is nothing closer to God on earth than a good big brother."

James grew up in the shadow of this older brother and he NOW describes HIMSELF in relation to Jesus as a bond-servant.

1 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

In that verse, James tells us WHOSE he is and WHO he is – a bond servant of God.

There is a deep humility in that greeting. He doesn't try to one up anyone by saying, "bond servant of GodAnd the younger brother of Jesus."

For those who like to play 6 degrees of separation or drop names, it would be a great temptation to point out to folks that you are the brother of Jesus. Imagine the temptation if James were alive today – whip out that cell phone and show all the selfies with Jesus while growing up.

True confession: I get a kick out of telling people that our youngest son was HAIRY DAWG for two years. Just imagine being the brother of Jesus.

James displays the humility he quotes in 4:6

Therefore *it* says, “GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.”

In a way that is couched in humility, James brings a sermon like message to his audience with a big focus on relationships. He starts with our need to take care of ourselves spiritually as he addresses two things from the beginning: dealing with trials and gaining wisdom.

If we're going to flourish in this broken world, we need to learn how to take care of ourselves in trials and we're going to need wisdom.

If we don't navigate those issues well, then we'll never make headway as we seek to maintain a godly approach to religion as described in Ch 1:26-27

26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his *own* heart, this man's religion is worthless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.

We cannot bridle the tongue and exhibit pure and undefiled religion if we are not maturing in our own lives – individually and corporately.

Though Jesus is only mentioned twice in James, we know that *Wisdom is someone we meet and maturity is developed as we walk with Jesus- the true and faithful elder brother who brings us to the Father.*

James refers to his audience in loving and familial terms by calling them “brethren” 15 times and “beloved brethren” 3 times in the first two chapters.

As we COME TO THE TABLE we remember that in Christ we are a family of faith. Look around you and you'll see people of various walks of life, different ages and stages of life. There are people here with whom you would have NEVER had a relationship apart from Christ.

You've heard the expression, “you are what you eat”, right? We'll this applies to the Lord's table. As we eat the body of Christ, we confess that we are the body of Christ.

N.T. Wright put it this way, “*When Jesus wanted to fully explain what his forthcoming death was all about, he didn't give a theory. He didn't even give the disciples a set of scriptural texts. HE GAVE THEM A MEAL.*”

This meal represents the family meal at the Marriage Super of the Lamb that Christ will celebrate with us in the future .

IF YOU KNOW Christ and have been admitted to the TABLE by a gospel proclaiming church, then you are invited to partake.