

SERMON October 4, 2020 “Our Enduring Faith”

Opening Prayer:

Heavenly Father, as creator of all things, Your mighty hand is ever-present...and by Your breath of life, we are living proof of Your gracious loving heart...And Father God, we come before You as faithful believers, and we ask that You give us the wisdom to understand your word...We ask that you strengthen us with courage, and fill us with joy as we endure the trials of our faith...And we pray these things in the name of Your Son, our savior, Jesus Christ...AMEN

Worship: *Gary will now lead us in worship, accompanied by Abby and Sue...* But folks, before we go any further...I would like us thank Gary and Abby and Sue for getting up here before us...each and every Sunday...and leading us in lifting-up our voices to God.

Announcements: I just have a few announcements first...

- Our Annual Church Business Meeting was held last Sunday...with the Budget for the upcoming fiscal year and a few changes to governing documents, being the main agenda items...as it was determined by a majority vote of the members present, other ongoing items were set for the next Church Business Meeting to be held October 18th at 3:00 p.m. at the Church Pavilion.
- Don't forget, If you're interested in our two active Bible studies...After Service, please see Nate for the Men's group at 9:30 am Thursday mornings...or Amos and Hannah for the family-oriented group at 5:00 pm Monday evenings.
- Thank you to all of you, who are able to continue to give to the Church...with your donations we are able to serve God...and serve one another.
- And remember, if you need to contact us, we can also be reached by email at: OV BCHawaii@gmail.com

Now let's Recap of Brother Nate's sermon from last Sunday:

Following His resurrection, Jesus appears to two disciples and accompanies them on their way to the village of Emmaus...though they did not recognize that it was Jesus who was there with them...while they are walking down the road and talking, Jesus sees that they are completely unmindful of what has been prophesied and written about Him concerning His crucifixion and resurrection...eventually, He has to explain to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures...then, upon reaching their destination, Jesus is about to continue on down the road when the two disciples ask Him to stay and eat with them because it is late in the day and evening is fastly approaching...And while reclining at the table, Jesus takes bread and blesses it and then breaks it and gives it to them...And it was at that very moment that they realized it was Jesus who had been there with them...for it was also at that very moment that our Lord vanished from their presence...So amazed were they, that they immediately got up and returned the seven miles to Jerusalem, and reported to the other apostles that Jesus had appeared to them on the road, and what happened to them at the table as they broke bread and ate with the Lord.

➤ **The Sermon for today is from James 1:1-11 “Our Enduring Faith”**

Friends, as we have finished the book of Luke, we are now going to begin in James...And this particular sermon is about what it takes to grow and show our faith...it's about the endurance of our faith as we are tested, and how that endurance makes us stronger...

You know, living a Christian's life is much like a marathon...and growing stronger and more vibrant in our faith is akin to **training** for a marathon...you train in increments, starting-off by running maybe a couple miles or so every other day for several weeks...then you increase your milage for a few more weeks...after that, you increase your milage again and again...and so on, until you have trained sufficiently enough to confidently run a full marathon over 26 miles...

In the same way, a new Christian believer learns by taking in small amounts of scripture at a time...in other words, like a baby, a new believer drinks milk before consuming solid food...eventually, growing in faith produces a healthy mature individual...one who is capable of enduring the tests and trials placed before them...

I know what it's like to run a marathon, I have trained for it and done it...and I can tell you for certain, that, like life, training is not always easy...but if you don't train properly, you won't finish the race...you'll get tired and weak, and finally, your body will give up and you can't go any further...

*Proper Training increases your endurance...*and it is also by training and endurance in our commitment to God, that we build strength in our faith, and are capable to make it to the finish...to be with Him, eternally, in heaven.

As with many things in our daily lives, we take things for granted...and perhaps, our very own faith in God can be one of those things...and that is something Satan targets us with each and every day...he wants us to take our faith for granted, so that he can chip-away at our spirit...he wants to make us weak...he wants us to give-up and drop out of the race...

Brothers and Sisters, this is why it is absolutely imperative that we devote as much time as possible to fervent prayer and reading God's word...it's like training...it keeps us strong so that our faith sustains us for the whole marathon of life...

➤ **We start off, now, with the first chapter in the Letter of James...**

Besides James, the half-brother of Jesus, there were other notable New Testament figures named James...such as James the son of Zebedee, and James the son of Alphaeus...But no traditional belief, lends itself to either of these two being the James who wrote this particular Letter or Epistle...

James was the half-brother of Jesus, but was **not** one of the twelve apostles...and for a while, at first, he was also **not** in agreement with his half-brother's teachings...However, following the resurrection of Jesus and His appearance to James...James becomes a leader among the Christians in Jerusalem, and ultimately became the head of the Church there in 44 AD.

When, **exactly**, this Epistle was written...has been debated among many scholars, but it appears that it was, indeed, written by James himself...and he probably did so between 48 AD and 52 AD, perhaps around the time of the Jerusalem Council, mentioned in the Book of Acts chapter 15...then, early documents state that in approximately 62 AD, James was martyred and stoned to death by order of the Sanhedrin...

James, often referred to as "James the just", was known for being practical and ethical, and the Epistle of James carries with it a moral sense, in keeping with the teachings of Jesus...as well as a sense of wise counsel, comfort, and encouragement...

Now, as James begins, he says in verse 1...

V.1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ: To the twelve tribes dispersed abroad., Greetings.

James addresses his letter to the dispersed twelve tribes of Israel...and while there have been other times that the Israelites have been scattered to other lands in what is often described as a "dispersion" (from the Greek word "Diaspora")...however, here, in particular, it is considered that James is referring to the persecuted Christian Jews from Jerusalem...following the death of Stephen by stoning, as stated in **Acts 8:1 and 8:3**...which says...

- 8:1 And Saul was agreeing with his murder. Now there happened on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.
- 8:3 But Saul was attempting to destroy the church. Entering house after house, he dragged off both men and women and delivered them to prison.

These two verses indicate that the persecution creating the dispersion among the Jewish Christians at that time was "**great**"...and it gives us a quick clear picture of who Saul was, **before** our Lord appeared to him on the road to Damascus and transformed his spirit, ultimately changing him into the repentant and Christ-loving disciple we know as Paul...

Peter mentions these same dispersed Jewish Christians in **his** writings as well, here is what he says in **1Peter 1:1**...

- Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the chosen who are residing temporarily in the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

Now, following his greeting...in verses 2 & 3 James begins to instruct those who have been scattered throughout, about their faith and the tests that are placed upon them because of it...

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

V. 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

My Friends, this is what I was talking about earlier...the **testing of your faith** is likened to training for a marathon...**it creates endurance**...it makes it possible to stand up against the evils of Satan and finish the race to heaven...but James is making a critically valuable point here...he is saying that we are to consider it **“all joy”** when we are tested and encounter various trials...what’s more, the joy James is talking about, is not a temporary happiness, but a long lasting state of well-being...

Remember in the book of Luke chapter 22 verse 31...when he was telling us about what Jesus had told Simon-Peter... “That Satan had demanded to sift him like wheat”...meaning that he and the other disciples would be severely tested...then Simon-Peter denied knowing Our Lord three times before the rooster crowed...and afterwards, Simon-Peter wept bitterly for what he had done...

Life can come at us fast and fierce, and if we are not prepared for it...we will fall hard! You know, there have been times in my own life that I have been hit hard and sifted like wheat...but by the grace of God, with His steadfast love and my enduring faithfulness in Him, I overcame many trials...

Folks, we don’t know what will happen to us from day to day...but we must train in our faith so that we are able to endure the trials and tests placed before us...

Hear now, as James describes the glorious **benefit** of “endurance” in verse 4...

V. 4 And let endurance have its perfect effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.

Now, as James tells us about building Christian maturity through endurance and patience, he seems to be referring not only to the hardships of daily life in general, but also specific trials and tests that may be extreme...such as persecution and poverty, which was ever-present in those early days of the church...and is also evident today...

James is absolutely correct...not only does being tested in our faith, give us endurance in our fight against Satan’s evil...but by considering it **all joy**, we build-up a stronger heart...we build-up a gladness and satisfaction with what we are able to overcome...**and ultimately, when we mature in our faith, it makes us complete**...

Friends, we build faith and hope in God, as we trust in Him while facing adversity...and by so doing, we become single-minded in our devotion, and we live with righteousness in our

hearts...this is about our patience and attitude while we endure hardship...and it's about our feeling *empowered* with a steadfast faith, derived from living by the will and word of God...

Let's move on to verses 5 & 6, where James tells us...

V. 5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously without reproach, and it will be given to him.

V. 6 But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.

What James is saying, is that we must be wise, and pray earnestly, as we ask God to meet our needs...and then, we must strongly believe, that if it be His will, He will answer our prayers...

Hear what it says in **Proverbs 3:5 & 6**, about the wise trusting in God...

- Trust Yahweh with all your heart; do not lean toward your own understanding.
- In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will straighten your paths.

Wisdom, as James writes about, includes the strength to act intelligently, avoiding reckless or angry behavior...In Hebrew, the word for wisdom from the verb "chakham", means "to be wise"...and to be wise means that we are open to discipline and teaching; a key tenet of Christian life...our speech itself is guided by wisdom...and morally, the wise Christian is reverent of God...

Again, listen to what is said in **Proverbs 1:7** about where wisdom comes from and those who detest Our Father's will and teaching...

- Fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge; wisdom and instruction, fools despise.

Accompanied by wisdom, and attributed to God, is understanding and discernment...which gives us the ability to pursue righteousness, justice, and piety...it gives us the discipline to accept instruction without anger, to be prudent and restrained in our speech and actions...it builds inside us a spirit-filled heart of strong faith...

Again, let's take a look in **Proverbs, this time in 8:11**...it says this about wisdom...

- For wisdom is better than jewels, and all desires shall not compare with her.

Folks, you know that the very picture of strong faith is evident throughout scripture...for instance, look at Noah, who believed in God and built an ark so that his family, and many of earth's animals, would survive the flood...or Moses and the Israelites in the desert, as God provided food and water for forty years...or Daniel as he was thrown into the lion's den, and was not killed and eaten...Strong faith in God, without doubting, will see us through whatever test or trial that is thrown at us...But we must believe, without any doubt, whatsoever...

Now, in verses 7 & 8, see here as James tell us about a person who beseeches God for help...and then at the same time, doubts the providence of God...

V. 7 For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord,

V. 8 being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

James is saying we must believe **wholeheartedly** and **without doubting**, when we pray and ask God for His help...and if not, then we are double minded and unstable...and if we are unstable in little, we will be unstable in much...we will be like a boat on stormy seas, driven off-course by turbulent winds...My Friends, God is our compass to keep the boat on course...

Those who scorn God and are false in their prayers and ways, lack righteousness...and they will not find relief in their sorrow...

See here what it says in **Proverbs 15:14**...

- The heart of him who understands will seek knowledge, but the faces of fools, they will feed on folly.

We need to remember, that it is **God** we must put all of our faith in...and **nothing** is beyond the power of God...he is the creator of all things...the air we breathe, the ground beneath our feet, and the light above us...instead of having doubt...I ask you, how can we **not** believe in Him...how can we **not** believe He will answer our prayers...**Friends, Believe it...our God is all-mighty...and we can absolutely rely on Him for everything...**

Now, in verses 9 thru 11, James goes on to tell us of the difference between a poor man and a rich man, in God's eyes...

V. 9 But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position;

V.10 and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away.

V.11 For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

James is speaking figuratively, of course...he is saying that someone who has little, and yet gives of what he has to those in need, will be praised and raised up in the sight of God...while a rich man who holds dearly to his purse, instead of giving freely to his fellow man, will wither away and be denounced in the sight of God...

But this is not only a reference to physical possessions...More importantly, James implies the possession of spiritual faith in God, a wealth everlasting and beyond measure...

See how this dovetail's with what is said in **1 Peter 1:23-25**...

- because you have been born again—not of perishable seed but of imperishable—through the living and enduring word of God.
- For, All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like a flower of the grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls,
- but the word of the Lord endures forever. And this word is the gospel that was proclaimed to you.

And this is reminiscent of what Jesus spoke about in the “parable of the guests”, where the dinner guests were all vying for the best position at the table...where in **Luke 14 verse 11**, Jesus says...

- “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Now a wise and moral life does not **always** produce prosperity...and you can clearly see, that the proof of this, is in the fact that earthly wealth does not stand the test to time...and as everyone knows, you can't take riches with you when you die...**worthy** pursuits **will** provide **genuine** happiness...true wealth comes from enjoying God's blessings...

See what **Proverbs 10:22** says...

- The blessing of Yahweh makes one rich, and he does not increase sorrow with it.

And it is in our Christian belief, that on judgement day, faithful believers will receive their greatest reward, eternal life in heaven...while those who idolize their possessions here on earth, can face eternal death...

Brothers and Sisters, in the first few opening verses of James' letter to the scattered believers...he is not only speaking to them individually, he is also speaking to the Church as a whole...the congregation of believers...and as believers, **let our faith speak for us**...let us not be double-minded like an angry sea, but calm in our demeanor as we are tested...let our endurance grow in righteousness...

Let us all give to the needs of others...particularly the poor...and those most in need of physical and spiritual support...Remember, by our acts of servitude to others...we will gladden the heart of God...Now that is something worth doing, don't you think?

So, after you leave here today, please find it in your heart to give as much as you can to those who are poor and needy...And also, I ask each and every one of you to consider praying to God for wisdom...and when you pray to Him, pray resolutely...without hesitation or doubt of any kind...and then, believe that the wisdom you asked for, has indeed, been given to you...

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➤ **We're now going to share in "The Lord's Supper"**

**So, please bow your heads as we ask for our Lord's blessing...**

Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior, we come gladly to your table and humbly ask your blessing upon the sacraments we are about to share, as we remember your sacrifice on the cross for our salvation...Jesus, we honor you, and offer our praise and thankfulness to you, as we pray these words in your name...AMEN

**I'm now going to read from Matthew chapter 26, verse 26...**

- Please remove the top layer of film covering the wafer and take it into your mouth as we share in the body of Christ.

**I'm going to read from Matthew chapter 26, verses 27 & 28...**

- Please remove the layer of film over the juice and drink it as we share in the blood of Christ.

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- **Please bow your heads and we'll close today's service in a word of prayer:**

Heavenly Father, glory be to you...you are our provider...you give us a desire to be closer to you...you give us strength and guidance, wisdom and knowledge...you sustain us physically and spiritually...you bless us with love and companionship, and your many gifts of grace...we thank you for all these things, but most of all, thank you for giving us your Son, our savior...and it is in His name we pray...Amen