

## James 1:1-4 'To The Scattered Ones!'

Last time in James we again looked at v1 of chapter 1: that James calls Jesus Lord, he calls Him Jesus, and he calls Him Christ! These are the three offices of the Son of God, for want of a better description. Having thought of himself very low, James then lifts Jesus high as Lord, even to the right hand of God and indeed equal with God Himself. As does Paul in Philippians 2:5-11 "Who being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped." I made the point that there is an epidemic which is sweeping through much of Christendom. An evil familiarity pervades much of the Christian world, that 'God is our mate'. Yet James, the very brother of Jesus, calls himself a slave; and Paul called himself the chief of sinners after decades of serving Christ. Yes, Lord, "Xurios." That name of the God of the Old Testament. The Sovereign Creator and Ruler of the entire universe.

Next James calls Him Jesus. That was the name which was announced by God through the Angel, that name which means "the Lord is Salvation." Matthew 1:21 "She will give birth to a Son, and you will give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." We looked at that Old Testament imagery which Jesus points us toward of God's judgement falling upon His people, for their base ingratitude of His deliverance of them out of Egypt. God sent deadly snakes throughout the camp, and Moses cast that bronze snake and lifted it up upon a pole in accordance with God's instruction. This was so that when people were bitten and looked toward that lifted up serpent, they would not die, but live.

Jesus owned all of those things in John 3:14-15 "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." But just as the people had to look toward that lifted up snake in the desert, we also must look towards Jesus' cross by faith and believe He is who he claimed to be!

And finally, we saw that James calls Jesus Christ: The Anointed One, the Messiah, the Promised One, to whom all the scriptures point. Luke 24:13-32 and v27 of that passage: "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself." And v32 "Were our hearts not burning within us while he talked with us on the road and open up the scriptures to us." Yes, Jesus is Lord, He is the Saviour, and He is the Christ. The promised Messiah to whom all the scriptures point!

And so we pick up the text in James 1:1-4 under the heading 'To The Scattered Ones!'

Verse 1 "James a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations." So to whom is James addressing this letter? Well, in one sense, it is those "twelve tribes" descended from Jacob who (when his name was changed by God) became Israel. And more broadly it is to all of those who are the true Israel of God, His true people, since the time of Jesus. And yet it does seem that the initial recipients of the letter, were those dispersed brethren of the church at Jerusalem who were "scattered" throughout the regions when the persecution broke out after Stephen's martyrdom at the hands of the Jews. James calls them the "diaspora," those "scattered among the nations." These people had literally been in effect driven from their homes and livelihoods.

And why? Simply because they were Christian! Their reality bore no resemblance to the easy road of the believer which many promise Christians today. No, their streets were not paved with ease and with gold. They were paved with persecution, with hardship, and with blood. And sometimes it was

their own blood! And this should not surprise us Beloved, because Jesus Himself said in Matthew 10:34-36: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."

So what is Jesus saying here? Is He saying that His reason for coming to the earth as a man, (even God become man) yes, is Jesus saying that His chief goal was to rip families apart? Well of course not. John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. That whosoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life." And Ezekiel 18:31b-32 "Why will you die O House of Israel? For I do not take pleasure in the death of any man. Repent and live." Jesus' coming was to bind families together and bring them to God.

No, what He is saying is that 'here is the reality. Do not think that the road ahead of you will be easy if you follow me. It's not one of peace and ease.' You see friends, we are all part of this "scattering," this dispersing, this persecuting throughout the ages, and throughout the world by Satan. And he uses all manner of avenues to wreak havoc and his fury upon the people of God. Jesus is saying, *"but if you follow me, your own family and friends may disown you. They may well even take up arms against you."* Beloved, I'm sure that many of us have experienced such things to different degrees. We hear words like, *"Yeah you know that I love you, but keep that Christian stuff to yourself. You've got your religion and I've got my religion. So please, stop asking me to go to church with you, I'm not going to go and you can't make me!"*

My own father used these very sentiments. Although perhaps in a much more gentle way. When I was first converted, both my parents were very glad that my lifestyle, (again for want of a better description) had changed, but when after some years they understood that my Christianity was not some passing phase, my mother asked Darlene, who was my fiancé at the time, *'Is Roy in some kind of cult? I don't know who he is anymore'*. Which, yes, is kind of funny, and yet at the same time it is indicative of this "scattering" which we now see before us. Again, when I was first converted, all the guys that I used to hang out with and go surfing with gave me a wide berth, because what I was now doing was strange, even to those ones who were estranged from the whole of mainstream society. But now, after decades, they actually accept and even respect who I unashamedly am in Christ!

But, yes, we are all part of this "scattering" of which James speaks, and also to which Jesus alludes. Because this world and this life is not the Christian's home. We follow a different king, and we belong to a different Kingdom! Yes James writes to the "scattered ones," because the persecution was real. At Stephen's death, in Acts 8:1-3 we read, "And Saul was there giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison." And in Acts 9:1-2 "Meanwhile Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem."

And friends, we must understand that when we read of both "men and women," this is very significant, because in those days, it was the men who were held accountable for the whole of their household. But such was the hatred and the vehemence of Saul's murderous zeal that there was no one who would escape his vengeance in his supposed service of God! Yes, the persecution was real Beloved. And the difficulties which believers face today, day in and day out just in everyday life,

(without even considering the hardships of being Christian in an increasingly anti-Christian society) is real. Jesus even said to follow Him is to “take up one's cross daily.” And as we all know, this meant you were not coming back. It was a one way ticket to an agonisingly slow death! Such was and is the reality that the true follower of Christ faces. Those daily trials, of sincerely seeking to deal with personal sin. And again also, dealing with those difficulties which we face from a world that is increasingly anti-Christian. As the old hymn goes, *‘Fighting fears from within and foes from without’*.

Yet even so, James says “Greetings.” The word in Greek which he actually uses here is “Xairein.” “Rejoice.” And friends we need to lay hold of the implications here. They were persecuted by family and friends; Jews were actually disowned by all and sundry if they became Christians. So too the Pagan, when they turned from their idolatrous practises. Yes, persecuted by family and friends, excommunicated from their places of worship and physically persecuted by the powers and authorities that be. And yet even so James says “Rejoice.” And he follows this up with, “Consider it pure joy my brothers when you face trials of many kinds.” The Greek puts it this way: “Deem it all joy my brothers, whenever into various trials you fall.”

So friends this places our petty discontents, our bellyaching, and our fault-finding with others, into a bit of perspective doesn't it. But Beloved please don't misunderstand me, I am certainly not saying that those all too real trials and difficulties that you have faced, or may well be facing now, are insignificant or of no consequence. I am not saying that. But I do know, that whatever they may be, (as we learned from our studies in the book of Esther) that God has a purpose for you in all of them! Not that you or I know, or even that we will ever know, what it is this side of heaven's glory.

Job never got an answer for his sufferings. We know that he was tested because of his uprightness in the sight of the Lord. God`s own words to Satan concerning him in Job 1:8 “Have you considered my servant job? There is no one on earth like him, he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.” And God repeats this commendation of his servant Job to Satan in chapter 2:3, and He even adds, “and he still maintains his integrity though you incited me against him to ruin him without reason.” Friends we've seen it all before. What Satan intends for evil, God has predetermined for good. And yet Job never learned, of these secret counsels of God for his life. These things were kept hidden from him this side of heaven!

Three times Paul asked God to “take away his thorn in the flesh.” Until recently, I was unaware that this “three times,” is a Hebrew idiom which conveys not only literally “three times,” but a persistence in prayer over a period of time. Even a non-stop praying so to speak. And this also may well be alluding to Christ's Own pleading with God in the garden of Gethsemane. And God's eventual reply to Paul? “My grace is sufficient for you.” Amazingly, Paul's own conclusion as to why this trial had come upon him? “To keep me from becoming conceited.” Yes, to keep him humble. To keep him relying upon God. He had been lifted to incredible heights in his service for Jesus. He believed so much so, that the danger be of him forgetting how he got there. Perhaps even the danger of beginning to rely upon himself! So Paul concluded that this difficulty was from God for his benefit to keep him humble, to keep him relying only and always upon Him!

Now Beloved I don't know, but perhaps that is why you and I have faced certain things throughout our life. So like James, these things help us to remember where we've come from and how we got here. To help us be ever on guard against that insidious sin of self-sufficiency. That we would ever turn to, and rely only upon God for all things. Yes all things! And James` point (as he speaks to those scattered ones) is that these difficulties are occuring for a purpose. God`s Own purpose in and for your life. He is at work! Yes. “Rejoice.” “Deem it all joy my brothers whenever into various trials you fall.”

Jesus has given us a wonderful reason as to why we should “Deem it all joy” in the midst of suffering in and for our faith in Him, in His sermon on the mount in Matthew 5:11-12 “Blessed are you, when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Now Jesus does three things in these verses here. Did you notice? Firstly, he makes it very clear that the true believer will face trials in this life for their faith in Him. Because he uses the word “when,” not if. In Paul's final letter to Timothy before he was martyred for his service to Jesus, he put it this way in 2 Timothy 3:1-2 “In fact, whoever desires to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” Yes similarly Paul uses the word “will,” not if. So the genuine follower of Christ will face many trials for their faith in Him. Friends if life is a breeze, if the world loves us as its own may I suggest, that according to Jesus, Paul and James, we are in dangerous territory!

Secondly, Jesus says in Matthew 5 “great is your heavenly reward,” and you go in good company. Look at it again. “For in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” So all of the prophets walked that same difficult, that same “straight,” and that same “narrow road” of hardship for Jesus! Stephen accuses the Jewish elite, before he was put to death by them in Acts chapter 7:51-52: “You stiff necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears. You are just like your fathers. You always resist the Holy Spirit. Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him.” So if difficulty finds us because of our faith, don't be downcast. “Rejoice.” Because like the prophets it is a sign of our authenticity. We are “in the world but we are not of the world” as Jesus said!

The third thing that He does in these verses is claim all of the Old Testament as His Own. Just as He does as we saw last time in Luke 24:13-32. Yes “all of the prophets” spoke of Him, and all of the Old Testament was written about Him. And James takes up this very idea which Jesus spoke of about, rejoicing in the eye of the storms of life into which our faith leads us. “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad.” Yes, “Deem it all joy” James writes!

Dear friends, facing difficulties or trials because of our faith in Jesus, and clinging to Him throughout such things. Or doing the same through other hardships that we face in this life, (whether they be financial, emotional, physical or any other areas of our life) all of these things have a purpose, even though as I've mentioned before, we may not understand it at the time. But the truth is, God the Holy Spirit is at work in our life. Slowly but surely transforming us into being that which God calls us to be, and that which Jesus died for us to become!

Look again at what James says in v2-3 “Deem it all joy my brothers whenever into various trials you fall, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” Now the word which James uses here for trials is “*peirasmoi*” and it is the very same word that is used for temptations. Because as with Job, Satan's goal in the midst of the trials of life, is to get us to turn our back on God. To tempt us to even shake our fist at Him and accuse Him of being heartless and uncaring. Just as Job's own wife said to him in chapter two, “Curse God and die.” Yes, that is Satan's goal. Satan the accuser, wants to get us to accuse and reject God. Lord where are you when I need you? Where are you when it hurts? Do you see? Do you care? Do you even exist at all? Matthew Henry points us to Ezekiel 11:16 here. From the King James version: “Thus sayeth the Lord God, although I have cast them far off among the heathen and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come.” And what was the message to them? And to indeed us? Well it is *though you be scattered*, (and as in James the scattered ones)

*yes though you be hard pressed and heavy laden, and though you be strangers in this world and in this life, I have not left you. For I will never leave you nor forsake you. Even for the sake of My Own Son! My faithful ones, even in the midst of distant lands and even in the darkest trials I will be your sanctuary. Yes I will be your peace in the eye of the storms of life!*

As King David wrote in Psalm 23:4 "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I'll fear no evil for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me!" James continues in v3: "Knowing that the testing (or proving) of your faith develops perseverance." The original has "works endurance." The Greek word which James uses here is "*Hupomonais*." And it means "to remain." To stay behind. Yes, to stay behind when others have departed. To bear up under. Yes to endure, to remain.

So although the days in which we live are increasingly anti-Christ, and evil and dark. And many who have claimed Jesus are abandoning the Way of Christ, (that way for which Saul dragged many off to their death) we "remain." Although many are casting aside the infallibility of the Bible, even seeking to employ humanistic ways and wisdom to apologise for the living Word of God, "we remain" loyal to the truth. '*Be not like them*' James is saying, because these struggles have a purpose! V4 "Perseverance and durance, must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." Yes these testings have a purpose. They are bringing us to maturity as Christians, as God the Holy Spirit is working through all of our lives circumstances and Providence from our Heavenly Father!

Again notice that the trials and difficulties that we face are actually a "work" of God the Holy Spirit. Coming to maturity in our faith and our walk with God is a process, because we are each one of us a work in progress. Although it is true that at the moment we are saved reconciliation to God through Jesus' sacrifice for us upon that cross, and heaven's glory are ours, they belong to us. But coming to "maturity" as Christians, does not happen overnight! As in the physical world, when a child is born it feeds from its' mother's breast. Then slowly but surely different foods are introduced to it. It learns to crawl, then to walk and talk and run. Goes to school, and learn all kinds of things. All kinds of head knowledge and soon, in many cases indeed knows more, then does their parents. But that is merely head knowledge and not wisdom.

If I can respectfully put it this way, the most brilliant mind the world will ever know (and may I suggest that it was Adam before he was tainted by sin) but yes the most brilliant mind that the world could ever know, may never come to real maturity even in a secular sense. We've all met these kinds of people haven't we? And yet in comparison to the genius, a person with a genuine and yet simple faith in God through Jesus, (by God the Holy Spirit chiselling away at the flaws in our character and practise) can come to maturity in their faith. And even possess the wisdom of Solomon! The word which is used for mature is "*teleion*" and it means "perfect." So "perfect and complete not lacking." Hebrews 2:10 even speaks of Jesus being "made perfect through suffering." You see His sufferings, allowed Jesus to acquire that which He was lacking in, and I speak respectfully. Through those things, He was made able to completely, perfectly, even experientially, understand the human condition. Through those anguishes and trials of life which He came to know all too well! Yes "perseverance, "endurance must finish its work so that you be perfect and complete, not lacking anything."

But unlike Jesus Beloved we are not "perfect," we are being made "perfect," "mature," and it is a process, and it happens through testings and trials. Yes we are a work in progress and that work will be complete when we pass through heaven's gates and stand before the king! So to bring this to a close this morning Beloved, we need to remember that the reality is that we too are "the scattered ones." We are strangers in a foreign land. Oftentimes even our own families don't understand us.

And yet even in the midst of life's difficulties we can rejoice, yes we can “Deem it all joy when we fall into all kinds of trials.” Because God the Holy Spirit is doing a work in us, and that work is preparing us for heaven.

Amen!

Let's pray.