

Prayer

We praise you and bless You, Holy and majestic Lord. You stand above all the cultures, institutions, governments and organisations of the world with the authority of the only One who can make all things happen according to Your own will and purpose. We place our trust in You because You alone can make good things happen out of everything we experience day by day. All glory be to You! AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Trees

Trees play their part in the cleanliness and gaseous balance of the air we breathe. Give thanks to God for the way that His creation, especially trees, works to support all forms of life.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks to God for the support you receive from friends
- Pray for those caught up in the earthquake in Java
- Pray for children who suffer because of bad schooling

Meditation

I go out to do my daily work;
With the radiance of this day's light
Glowing on my every move:
The Creator knows my doing.

I thank Him for this opportunity;
He has selected me for a task
And in its doing I am fulfilled:
The Creator knows my being.

I focus to dispel my wandering;
The motivation of His presence
Directs my mind and rules this work:
The Creator knows my thinking.

I serve the only God for all my life;
His wisdom ever goes before
And all my graft is for His glory;
The Creator knows my working.

Bible Study - James 1:1-4

¹ James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Greetings to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.

² Think of it as gladness, my brothers, whenever you face all kinds of trials, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance, ⁴ and let perseverance do its work so that you may be whole and complete, lacking nothing.

Review

It is possible, perhaps likely that the letter of James was written by James the brother of Jesus, one of the senior figures amongst the disciples after the resurrection. The letter does not say this, simply identifying James as a 'servant' of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:1), but its place in scripture is testimony to the belief amongst early Christians that this was indeed the case. There are occasional references to James within scripture (Acts 12:17, 15:13, Gal 1:19,2:9, 2:12), and he was an enigmatic yet apparently powerful figure in the life of the Early Church. In this letter he wrote to the 'twelve tribes scattered among the nations' (1:1). At the time of Jesus and for the next hundred years, the 'twelve tribes' of the Jewish people lived increasingly around the whole Roman Empire across Europe, North Africa and the Middle East as we know it. Jerusalem and Israel became politically unstable and the Romans eventually destroyed Jerusalem in AD70, causing

large numbers of Jews (and Christians) to disperse throughout the known world. It was to these people, some of whom would have been Christian, that James wrote, and the general theme of his letter is the difference the Christian Faith and Judaism.

It is not surprising therefore that much of the teaching in James' letter echoes the teaching of Jesus; after all, he was a disciple. The first part of today's reading (1:2-4) reminds us powerfully of Jesus' words at the conclusion of the beatitudes: 'blessed are the persecuted ... blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you' (Matt 5:10,11). If you read on, you will also find that the verses in James which come next (1:5-11) remind us of the saying in the Sermon on the Mount 'ask, and it will be given to you, seek and you will find' (Matt 7:7). One wonders whether the link between 'faith' and being tossed by the 'waves of the sea' (James 1:6) reflects the author's memory of that famous occasion when Peter attempted to demonstrate his faith by walking on the water (Matt 14:22-33)! As we study James, we will find many more surprising connections between the recorded life and teaching of Jesus, and the letter of James.

James began his letter, however, with a simple instruction, but one that is a hard lesson for any of us. He encouraged his readers to grow in maturity through facing the trials that came their way. In the same way that Jesus made it clear to all who followed Him that although they would be persecuted they would inherit God's Kingdom (Matt 5:10), James told his Jewish readers that persecution and tests of faith were more than part of the life of faith. He told his readers that such things enabled a person to grow into 'wholeness', or 'completeness' (1:4). This is a challenge to Christians today who like to think that the life of faith today is intended to be good, happy and generally 'all right', and that if anything is troublesome or amiss, then something is wrong with a person's faith. Jesus' teaching and that of his brother James indicate that the reverse is true! If we experience no trials or temptations, then we should ask some big questions about faith!

How many times have you heard a person say that they gave up church when life became hard? We may have great sympathy for those who experience trouble, but if their reaction has been to reject the people God has made as His own, the church, did they really have a mature faith to begin with? We must ask the question. However, we must ask the question of ourselves before we can ask it of others, for in order to resist the temptation to abandon our faith and the church when trouble comes, we must be fully aware that we should expect such troubles. The Gospel warns us that doing what is right will create opposition; a fact we can easily verify, and with Christ at our side we can overcome troubles, forge ahead, learn from our difficulties and grow in faith and maturity.

It remains a great sadness that people are led to believe that they have become Christians without facing these elementary facts of life and the Christian faith. This should be the normal Christian experience for us all.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Imagine what it must be like for someone (James) to address his brother (Jesus) and 'Lord', and 'Christ'. What qualities of faith are needed to do this?
2. Do Christians generally know about how persecution can effect them from what they are taught in church from the pulpit? If not why not?
3. Discuss ways in which you feel that you have grown through the trials of life. How can we best encourage those who are having trouble at the moment?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

It is very hard to live with James' advice. It is easy enough to say these things, but incredibly hard to live by them. Trials and sufferings are precisely that. However, it is certainly my experience that if you place yourself in God's hands even though you suffer, this is a far safer place to be than apparently without troubles and yet stricken by all manner of unseen sin.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Over a period of time, look up a number of different passages which talk about suffering – Matt 5:11,12; Romans 5:1-5; Ephesians 3:13; 2 Tim 1:8 etc. Discuss with a friend the 'trials' you experience, and see whether they feel the same after you have talked about them!*

- *Write a prayer that asks Jesus to help you in time of need, and keep it in a diary. Do not get it out only when you are in need, make sure you read it when life is going well, because this will help you gain a good balance in your understanding of faith and life.*

Final Prayer

Praise You, Lord God, for Your Light is life to me, and by Your Light in Jesus Christ I am saved and delivered from sin. Fill me even now with Your Light, so that I may live for You and help to bring Light into this world of darkness. I ask this in the Name of Jesus, the Light of the World. AMEN
