

James 1:1-4 – How can there be joy during trials?

TSK, Lexicon, Ellsworth, Henry, JFB, Geneva, Poole, Calvin, Gray, Trapp, Robertson, PNT, Vincent, Family, Gill, Gaebelein, Adamson, Doriani, INT? Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: Some who have read this epistle have argued that *they only see* are commands and not much, *if any*, of the Gospel. They are making a terrible mistake. We don't want to do that. **So we will try to be careful and get the full intent of this wonderful letter.** As we do, **you will find this letter to be filled with the Gospel message from beginning to end and has a rich Christo-centric doctrine from beginning to end.**

The theme of James' epistle is: **Your true faith must be seen in godly works.** Put in a fancy way: "**Conformity to the law of God is indispensable to true faith.**" I hope you now see how remarkably applicable this letter is for us today in the West where most people claim to be Christians (claim to have faith) but their lives don't synchronize with what they say they believe (show good works).

But today, in these first four verses you will get **an introduction and a set-up for the rest of the letter.**

Our headings are:

The People addressed in this letter

The Prologue of this letter

Our goals are: **That you will know that living well for the Lord is not easy and that there will be trials in your life, but you will also know you are able to still maintain the joy of your salvation and continue to obey the Lord.**

The People addressed in this letter

1 James, **a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,** To the **twelve tribes** which are **scattered** abroad: Greetings.

1. James, the writer of this epistle, was likely the brother of Jesus.

But more than being the brother of Jesus, he was a bond servant of Jesus. James' physical relation to Jesus did not make him better. He had to have faith in Jesus. Early in James' life he did not believe in Jesus, but Jesus appeared to him after the resurrection. (1Corinthians 15) **James' faith made him a spiritual servant.** He realized what Jesus did for him on the cross.

2. James wrote to mostly Christian Jews of the diaspora and some Gentile converts.

The diaspora referred to Jews who were living in foreign countries after they were forced there by the Assyrian Empire in 722BC, by the Babylonian Empire in 586BC, by the Greek Empire, and by Roman Emperor Tiberius in the 1st century. Tiberius drove Christians out of Rome.

3. James did not write to one single church, however, but to the churches of the diaspora in general.

The Jews were living everywhere so James wrote to them everywhere. **Many Jews of the diaspora would often travel back to Jerusalem for one of the annual feasts.** At one such great feast, Pentecost, in Acts 2, many returning Jews heard the Gospel, believed, became Christians, and then they went back home. Acts 2:9 "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 "Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, **both Jews and proselytes,** 11 "**Cretans and Arabs** — we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God." **Three thousand men were converted at that Feast of Pentecost.**

4. Lessons:

a. Blood relations with good people are not enough. You have to have faith in Jesus...personal faith...to be saved.

b. Look at the care Christians have for each other! Let this love and care always be in your heart and in your hand. James could have said, "I am living in safety; let them fend for themselves," but he didn't, and neither should you! Wherever God's people are, there your heart and your hand should be also.

c. A great leader is a great servant! That is the Christian way. The more superior the position, the greater the need for service. In this way James learned from his brother, the one who was called the Suffering Servant – the one who gave up heaven!

The Prologue of this letter

2 My brethren, **count it all joy** when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

1. James reminded his readers they would fall into trials as sure as it is day.

Never was there a time in Christianity when Christians did not face trials of various kinds. Even in the godliest times Christians faced trials.

2. Those trials come from 2 sources: The Devil and the Lord.

What's the difference between the two types of trials?

God tests his people to show their faith and to bless their faithfulness, like when God tested Abraham through trial when he asked him to sacrifice his son, Isaac. God then blessed him for his living faith – a faith that worked.

The Devil tempts people to stop them from fulfilling their duties and bring judgment on themselves. The Devil brought troubles on Job so he could destroy him. If Job had yielded and doubted God, Satan would have destroyed him.

3. Christians of the diaspora faced some severe trials, as you will see throughout this letter.

Suffering was the norm for the Christian life.

1 Peter 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,

4. What were some of the trials Christians of the diaspora faced?

Christians who wanted to faithfully serve the Lord were **targeted for persecution by Jews** who did not believe in Jesus.

Christians faced threats from Rome who insisted all citizens and servants of Rome worship Caesar as god. Just a few years after this letter, Rome would besiege and eventually destroy Jerusalem, the spiritual home of the Jews.

Christians were looked down on by Gentiles and were often excluded from doing business with them. Many Christians therefore **faced unemployment**.

Christians were pressured to follow false doctrines, particularly from fellow Jews.

Christians were hated by many nations as a course of history because they were of Jewish ethnicity, mostly because Jews were often miserly businessmen.

Christians faced sickness, which was common because of poverty and exclusion.

Christians faced hard work and unproductive land, caused by drought.

Persecution was so bad, many Christians had to flee to other foreign countries to live.

5. James then urged Christians to count it a joy when they endured these trials.

He did not mean they were to be giddy when they had troubles and say: “Yaay, I lost my job.” Hurray, my husband is sick.” Yesss, I broke my toe! No one loves diseases, death, starvation, or imprisonment. That would be masochistic.

a. Christians had to be willing to suffer and endure hardships out of love for God.

(And keep in mind they were to have “all” or “full” joy during their trials.)

When they were fed to lions, because they knew it would bring some glory to the Lord who died for them, they could have joy.

When they were not allowed to do business and were unemployed, they would reflect on their riches and treasures in heaven, and they could have joy.

When they were able resist false doctrine and hold on to truth, and they knew their Redeemer would rejoice, they would have joy.

When they were hated for believing in Jesus but they kept the faith, they would be reassured by the Holy Spirit of Jesus’ love for them and they would have joy.

When they were sick, they remembered one day all sickness would be wiped away, so they had joy!

When they didn’t have enough to eat, they knew they had the Bread of Life and their souls would forever be satisfied, so they had joy.

When they faced death, they could see Jesus waiting for them on the right hand of the Father with their reward and they could face death would joy.

Matthew 5:11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

6. But joy wasn’t the only thing they received from keeping the faith; they received patience or perseverance also.

Perseverance is a treasured fruit.

Romans 5:3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that **tribulation produces perseverance**;

We note the remarkable similarity to what Apostle Paul taught! He and James weren't teaching contradictory doctrines.

4 But let patience have its perfect work, that **you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.**

7. But joy and perseverance were not the only benefits from keeping the faith: Christians who patiently endured their trials, would have inward satisfaction – satisfaction of the soul!

Hebrews 10:36 For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, **you may receive the promise:**

1 Peter 1:7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, **may be found to praise, honor, and glory** at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

Perseverance under trial had a good effect on their souls. And when their souls were satisfied, they lacked nothing. They would have no "*spiritual*" lack. Health, money, physical safety...all meant so little, that those things were called nothing!

8. Lessons:

a. If you allow the trials of life to frustrate you (and who hasn't been frustrated from all the Covid lockdowns and sickness) it is easy to forget the benefits of enduring troubles in life. And surely you did not focus on the joys, perseverance, and satisfaction of the soul – gifts you have a Christian. But **you have to rub the shoes for it to shine. Clay bricks are useless until they are burned. Only after they are burned are they waterproof.** So rethink suffering and don't allow trial to frustrate you. Benefit!

b. Focus on the joys of Christians. What are some of those joys God gives you? Has God's Holy Spirit left you alone for one second in the last 15 months? Never! Was your name removed from the Lamb's Book of Life? Absolutely not! Did God remove your assurance of salvation? No! He cannot!

1 Thessalonians 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So let nothing take away the joy you have as a Christian. Let it motivate you to face your trials!

c. Pray for perseverance. Perseverance makes you able to subject yourself to God's will – even when he sends trials. Don't let your perseverance to be one inch shorter than your troubles.

d. How you suffer in your trials is a testimony to your fellow believers and the world.

If you graciously endure trials, you will strengthen the faith of Christians.

If you graciously endure trial, you will cause non-believers to ask about Jesus.

If you graciously endure trials, you will bring glory to the Lord Jesus.

Conclusion:

James wrote to Christians in disparate lands, but they had one thing in common: They knew Jesus. James encouraged them not to lose their joy as they experienced hardships because the big issues of their lives had been taken care of.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. There is a common bond between Christians from all walks of life. You love and care for each other. You are of one blood – Jesus' blood. Don't ever get tired of loving and caring for each other.

2. Don't let the worries of Covid, or unemployment, or singleness, or hatred from the world, or mocking from the world, or a broken relationship, or whatever your test may be, take away the joy that came to you in Jesus. He died to give you that joy. Don't let his death be counted as nothing.

3. Suffer with grace so you might encourage your brothers and draw non-believers to Jesus.

Finally, if you are not a Christian, trials make you miserable because there is no purpose in them. So you avoid them at all costs. Hell is your only reward. But there are rewards for enduring trials. If you want to get these rewards you have to have a heart change and become God's child. If you want to become God's child, ask him.