

## James 1B

- The book of James is probably the most misunderstood letter in the New Testament
  - Martin Luther tried to eliminate the letter from the canon of Scripture because he misunderstood James' intent in writing on matters of faith
    - Luther presumed that James was teaching that works were combined with faith to yield our salvation
    - He even placed the letter in the appendix of the Bible he translated into German
  - James does not teach that works and faith must be combined for salvation
    - Instead, James presents the importance of faith at work in a Christian's life
  - Consider James' principle audience again
    - His audience were largely Jews
      - Jewish men and women who prior to a faith in the Gospel were raised up under a rigorous set of rules and restrictions defined in the Mosaic Law
      - Life under the Law is terribly difficult
    - And this harsh life of following rules and limitations was instituted by God for the Jewish nation to achieve two outcomes
      - First, it set them apart from the world
        - They were a peculiar people, with unique customs, and completely separated from the rest of the world
        - It preserved a line to the Messiah and gave rise to the prophets and God's word
        - The Law was comprehensive and restrictive because through all those regulations, the uniqueness and separation of the Jewish people was assured

- Secondly, the Law was a tutor or schoolmaster over the nation
  - It regulated sin and promoted morality
  - It illustrated how sin requires a payment of blood
  - It revealed the holiness of God
  - Ultimately, it frustrated the Jew who believed he could be righteous by his own work, and it drove him to look for another solution...to a Messiah
- But by James' day, Jewish Christians were coming to understand that by faith in the Messiah they had met the requirements of the Law
  - And so they were no longer under Law
  - They were now under grace and able to live without the rules and restrictions of the Mosaic Law
    - It's a liberating experience, but it also brought dangers and bad habits
  - These bad habits and bad assumptions are James' principle concerns as he writes this letter
    - And this fact explains why James is so often seen connecting faith with imperatives for action or response
    - We see him do that for the first time today as we return to Chapter 1, in verse 5

[James 1:5](#) But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

[James 1:6](#) 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.

[James 1:7](#) For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, [James 1:8](#) being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

- Remember from last week, we learned that the wisdom James is speaking of here is the the knowledge we need to face a trial
  - James isn't speaking about wisdom for every circumstance
    - Not every request for knowledge will gain an answer...

Like when Satan once asked God to give him an answer for Satan's poor reputation. He said to God, "You made a world that wasn't fair. You made it so that most people have to struggle every day, fighting against their natural desires, dealing with all kinds of losses, grief, disasters, and catastrophes. Yet people must still worship and adore you. But when people fight, get in trouble, and cheat each other, I always get blamed, even when it is not my fault. Sure, I'm evil, but can't you do something to help me spread the blame around a little?"

And so God created lawyers.

- But for the rest of us, the promise James gives us is that God will answer our calls for wisdom when facing trials in life
  - What a wonderful promise that is...that we will receive the answers to God's tests
- But then James puts a stipulation on how we ask for that knowledge
  - We must ask in faith
    - Here's the first connection James proposes between faith and action
    - When we act to seek God's wisdom, we must act in accordance with faith
- Let's examine what James is saying here
  - In the text I read, the NASB translation is unfortunate in the way it renders the Greek word *diakrinomenos* (doubting)
    - The word literally means to discern or judge between, but when taken with James' example of a surf, it conveys an entirely different sense
      - He's not talking about someone who doubts but a man who has a divided motive or inconsistent approach to facing trials
    - The King James Bibles gets it right

**James 1:6** But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

- There you see the connection between vacillating and the movement of the sea's surf, in and out, never stable

- James goes on to describe this person as someone driven and tossed by the wind
- So what kind of person is James talking about?
  - First, the person is unstable and wavers
    - In the context of what James teaches, we're talking about someone who is wavering and unstable in where they seek their understanding of their circumstances
  - In the midst of trials, the believer who calls out to God for wisdom must remain stable in his reliance on God
    - That reliance begins with a recognition that God is the One producing the test, the trial
    - And secondly, the reliance continues in seeking godly wisdom to face the circumstances, rather than growing impatient and running to a worldly solution
  - That's the instability that James says results in God withholding the wisdom we desire to face the trials
- Let me give you a story to illustrate what James is talking about
  - A Christian man is experiencing a trial in his life
    - He's the father of a teenage son, and the son has entered a rebellious period
      - The son is running in the wrong crowd, is struggling at school and showing disrespect for his dad
      - The father is a relatively young Christian, so he's not very mature in his Christian walk, and he feels unprepared to face this trial properly
    - One day the son has a run in with the police, and he has a court date with the possibility of receiving months of community service and probation
  - The father wonders how to deal with his son's situation
    - Someone tells him to ask God for the wisdom to face the trial

- The man prays and reads God's word, and the father senses God telling him to let his son face the decision of the court, but he's not sure that's the right course
  - While he's wondering, the father runs into a friend who says he knows the judge and can get the matter settled quietly on the side and save his son from any penalty
    - The father wavers unsure what to do
    - He goes back to prayer again and asks God to give him direction
  - The father hears nothing and decides to take his friend up on the offer
    - The judge dismisses the charges and the son escapes the penalty
      - What do you think happened to the son later?
- More importantly, why didn't the father in this story hear from God when he asked about which option to accept?
  - Because he wavered
    - As James explains, when we approach God for the wisdom to face a trial, we must approach the throne boldly but also with faith
      - Faith to accept that the wisdom we receive from God is the right answer
        - The father was instructed by God to let the son receive his due penalty
        - Because only by suffering the consequences of his actions could the son be rescued from his destructive pattern
      - But the father wavered, and wavering means going back and forth between godly answers and worldly answers
        - He was an unstable man, as James calls him
        - In all his ways...this is a characteristic of his personality or spiritual immaturity

- And his is double-minded, which means doubled-souled
  - I think of Lot as such a person
- But the reverse is also true
  - When we grow in our maturity and reliance on God's direction, from both study of His word and from prayer life
  - We become a more stable person with respect to spiritual maturity
    - We are equipped to face trials big and small in ways that let us roll with the punches
    - All the while accepting and often understanding God's purposes through it all
- But it's a mark of spiritual immaturity when we won't patiently wait on the Lord and then accept His answers when we receive them
  - Rather than seek better answers elsewhere or simply follow our own opinions
- For that person, there will always be a temptation to receive the world's answers, because the world is always ready with answers to our questions
  - There's Dr. Phil, Redbook, Cosmo, our neighbors, our family, our horoscope, etc.
    - Even Christian friends and books offer advice, some of it sound even
    - But none are a replacement for God's own voice and His own word
- So, if you want God to give you wisdom to face trials, learn stability
  - Rest in Him, and don't go seeking a hundred answers rather than accepting His alone
- James then moves to a third principle of facing trials...our position in the world

[James 1:9](#) But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; [James 1:10](#) and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away.

[James 1:11](#) 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.

- Have you ever thought of wealth or status as a form of trial or test in itself?
  - It certainly is, and it doesn't matter which end of the financial spectrum we find ourselves
    - God has placed us where we are in terms of our financial position as another kind of test to develop our spiritual maturity
    - James addresses both ends here as he continues to teach on how a Christian lives through adversity
  - First to the brother of humble circumstances, it's an inward test
    - When we say humble or poor, we're talking about someone who lives on the low end of whatever spectrum exists within a given community
      - That person will be faced with an inward test of how to understand those circumstances and maintain the proper attitude through them
    - What is the right way to face this trial?
      - How do we show spiritual maturity as we contend with needs we can't meet in this life?
      - How does that person show Christ?
  - If you listen to the smiley-faced prosperity teachers of our day, the answer is to seek for that wealth "in faith" and demand God provide it
    - But what does James teach? Essentially, the opposite
      - James says take your satisfaction, and "glory in" spiritual riches you will have in the kingdom which you earn with your spiritual maturity
      - Set your mind on things above, not on the things of earth, as Paul says in Colossians 3:2

- Then to the brother who finds himself with wealth, the test is similar but it's an outward test
  - Don't glory or celebrate your earthly wealth
    - Find your satisfaction in remaining humble before the Lord
    - Like David said:

[Psa. 51:3](#) For I know my transgressions,  
And my sin is **ever before** me.

- Our humility should be our chief concern...being "proud" of our humility
- And riches and humility are usually in opposition
  - Money is a means to independence, to living as if there is no God
  - We can follow our flesh and pride as far as our money will take us
- And so when God grants someone wealth, it's a serious test of spiritual maturity
  - Will we forgo the independence that wealth offers us and rely on the Lord despite our wealth?
- How often do you think Christians pass these tests?
  - First, consider how long this test lasts
    - It's the test that never ends
      - It seems that our perspective of money is a chief tool the Lord uses to develop our spiritual maturity
    - So we are to live with eyes for eternity knowing that nothing in this world lasts into eternity except our degree of spiritual maturity
  - In v.11 James compares the world's wealth to the beauty of flowering grass, which in a desert climate like Palestine didn't last very long
    - Think about Job and how quickly his wealth vanished...or others today

- So be careful what you wish for when you seek riches
  - You're asking for a seriously difficult test of spiritual maturity, and it will be one that many people fail
- From the trials of wealth, James moves forward to his next lesson on trials

**James 1:12** Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

- Now James turns his teaching to what the future holds for the man (or woman) who faces trials and tests successfully
  - Firstly, the person who endures or perseveres through trials has the potential to experience a blessed life
    - Blessed simply means a spiritually happy and content life
    - Think about that for a moment
      - Enduring trials and stressful tests that God brings us will result in a peaceful and contented life
      - Because through those experiences and the resulting spiritual maturity, we gain the ability through Christ in us to see these circumstances entirely differently
      - And the blessing is the contentedness that comes from having eyes for eternity
  - Secondly, once that person is approved...they receive a reward
    - The word approved is *dokimos*, which is the word for tested
    - Once they have passed the test, in other words
      - Then they are worthy to receive the crown of life
      - This is a crown the Lord has promised to those Who love Him
    - The word for crown is *stephanos*, which was the wreath awarded to the olympians who won a race
      - It reflects an award that we can earn through performance
      - Therefore, we understand it's not a symbol for salvation

- Never does Scripture refer to our salvation as a wreath or crown that we can earn, for it is by grace alone
- This is one of five crowns or wreaths mentioned in the New Testament for believers who excel in serving the Lord through trials
  - Crowns are measures of our faithful service and they will play some role in defining our authority in the coming Kingdom
  - And these awards are presented when the test is over, at the Judgment Seat of Christ that all believers will face
- This is the crown for anyone who perseveres through to the end of a trial brought upon them to test their love for Christ
  - Remember, we're not talking about a test of whether we believe in the gospel or whether we are saved
  - We're talking about a test of spiritual maturity that demonstrates or proves our love for Christ
    - And the purpose of the testing is to develop us and create a witness for Christ that brings Him glory in the world
- Jesus asks for a similar commitment from the early church in Smyrna
  - In that city, there was a particularly strong persecution against the Jewish Christians by unbelieving Jews in the local synagogue
    - They endured exactly the sort of trial and test that James is speaking about here
      - In fact James' words were prophetic in the way they foretold what the Jewish Christians would face
  - Jesus says it this way to that church in Revelation

**[Rev. 2:8](#) "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:**

**[Rev. 2:9](#) 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.**

[Rev. 2:10](#) 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

- Jesus describes Himself as the the One Who was dead and is now alive to a church that was soon to experience martyrdom
  - He wants to encourage their faithful witness even in the face of death
    - That's quite a trial and test, isn't it
      - But remember what James says about the reward
      - Only after we have passed the test will we expect to receive a reward
        - Failing the test doesn't get us the reward
    - But to the one who is approved, the crown of life is held out as a reward for those who endure trials
      - Did you notice that Jesus also called it a "test" in v.10?
  - Our walk with Jesus is a walk by faith, but it is also a walk of faithfulness
    - And the tests God brings us are intended to give us opportunity to prove that faithfulness and our spiritual maturity
      - And then He is prepared to reward us at the appropriate time