

VII. James in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel Life According to James
“A Cap Stone and a Foundation Stone”
James 1:16–18
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
November 17, 2013 – Morning Sermon

We are in James 1. We are coming to the conclusion of this first section. I will start in verse 2 to give a background to where we have been. James 1:2-16 says
[2] Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

[5] If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. [6] But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. [7] For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; [8] he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

[9] Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, [10] and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. [11] For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

[12] Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. [13] Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” (which is our tendency) for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. [14] But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. [15] Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

[16] Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Whenever you look at a couple of focus verses like this that are clearly in context you must understand that context. I have entitled this A Capstone of Summation and a Foundation Stone of Anticipation. I have done this because everything that has gone before this opening is now summed up at this point. It’s a capstone but it’s also a foundation stone anticipating what we’re going to get to. We bring to a conclusion this first section. After this section we’ll pick up the next section starting in James 1:19.

We are in the book of James and James is a rock star pastor. He is the pastor at the mega church in Jerusalem. All kinds of people are getting converted, 5,000, 4,000 etc. It is an unbelievable church. He is also the brother of Jesus. He wasn’t converted until after the resurrection. He writes the first book of the New Testament fifteen years after the ascension of Jesus. This becomes the most quoted book in the New Testament. It is packed full of Gospel wisdom maxims of which we are studying one in this first section.

What is the purpose of this Gospel wisdom book? The theme of this book is the Gospel life of persistent ministry and joyful maturation in a sin cursed world. Christians live a Gospel life that is characterized by two things; an imperfect but persistent ministry

and obedience and a joyful maturation even in a sin cursed world. We are able to do that because we are given a Gospel foundation with a Gospel motivation and Gospel wisdom to lead the Gospel life.

James is a pastor and this is not an evangelistic book. Twenty one times he uses the phrase ‘my beloved brothers...’ He is writing to professing believers and he is telling us that when we have a Gospel foundation we have a new heart, a new record, a new life, a new home and we have a new family. Now we have a Gospel motivation for you love Him who first loved you. To live that Gospel life in a sin-cursed world you have to have Gospel wisdom. James does not pull any punches when it comes to telling us how to get that Gospel wisdom. He starts off with a reality that believers in this world face trials, suffering and adversity. In fact, every trial that an unbeliever faces a believer will face except one. Unbelievers face the condemning righteous judgment of God to those who do not know Christ. Believers don’t face that because Jesus took all of that for us but we will face death, sickness, disappointment, suffering, adversity, and unmet expectations because we are in a sin-cursed world.

James says that he has good news for us. We are to count it all joy when we encounter various trials and he gives us a Gospel maxim. He says not to be deceived. Being a Christian is not going through life with no trials. Here is Gospel wisdom maxim number one. The multi-faceted and inevitable trials of life are designed and sent by the sovereign grace of God to prove, hold firm, be steadfast and to improve, let it have its full effect. Don’t count the trial joy but count it joy when you encounter the trial knowing that God has taken the trials of this life and has designed them to show you that He has made them into tests.

What do tests do? They show you where you are and what you know. Stand firm. They also show you what you don’t know and where you need to be so that it has its full effect. That is the purpose of the test or trials of life that God says to count joy for this is God working on you, in you and through you so that you can persistently minister, grow in grace and joyfully mature in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

I became a Christian in 1969 and at that time I was a little bit of an athlete. As a new Christian I was pretty zealous, intense and excited so that meant for me that I was going to be a Youth Director in a small church. I didn’t know where to start but I just kind of dug in and went forward. At this youth retreat we had I had this young lady give her testimony and this young lady had the motivation to want everyone there to become a Christian because she had become one at a youth retreat. She told everyone “You need to become a Christian at a youth retreat because I did and when I did all my problems went away.” That is not true. If James had been at that youth retreat he would have gotten up and put his arms around her and said “Nice try. Bad theology.”

Trials in life are inevitable. We think that trials in life are interruptions in life but actually it’s life. The absences of trials are the interruptions. In this world trials in life are our life. We are not looking at the trials as joyful but what God is doing in them and designed to do through them. Trials are multi-faceted. You want to be married but you’re in the trial of being unmarried yet when you get married you enter into the trial of being married. Perhaps you don’t have children so you’re in the trials of being without a child but when you get children you now have the trials of having children. Anytime there is a change there is a trial in life for the believer.

So how do you meet it? You have to have Gospel wisdom. James said to consider it all joy my brethren, knowing... you have to have that Biblical knowledge that wisdom of life. How do you get it? First of all, he says to pray for it. Then you begin to live in light of it. Do not be deceived my brothers, for the Christian life is not problem free. It is problem full. In fact, I have all kinds of problems that I never had until I became a believer. What you get are the answers to the problems, the strength and power to deal with the problems and the knowledge that God is doing a refining work in your life through the trials of life. He is also showing you where you are and where you need to be.

Take Daniel for example. Here is Daniel being blessed and there is all this jealousy in the empire from the other wise people and they want to pull him down. They say "We're not going to get Daniel unless we get Daniel's religion because Daniel is always going to be found within the law of his God. So we're going to get the king to pass a law that will make Daniel disobey the law which he won't do and that will make the king mad and put him in the lion's den." So they put this 30 day trial together and we know how Daniel ends.

Look at Abraham. He was promised a child. He went until he was 90 plus years old, without a child and that was a trial. Then he got his child, Isaac. Then he was told to take Isaac up to Mount Moriah and sacrifice him to God. This became a trial. There are tests all over the place in the Bible. In the first six chapters of the book of Daniel there are trials all over the place. God is using this test in Daniel's life to refine him and these others are trying to trap him. When the trial came he was steadfast. He kept doing what he knew he was supposed to do. Then it had its full effect and he had the opportunity to meet Jesus in the lion's den. Now he was able to know more stuff that he didn't know before because of his encounter with Jesus. So he stood fast and grew in the midst of it. Don't be deceived. You're going to have trials. God is using the trials and those things are happening in your life for God's purpose.

By the way, a trial also does one more thing. Every trial has the potential to become a temptation. The problem is not the trial or the test or the God who gave the test. Don't let anyone say that the test caused them to sin. The problem is what was inside of you which was an over desire. It was a valid desire which became an over desire and you will sacrifice anything to satisfy that over desire, whether it's to get married, to get a certain job or to keep a certain job or to get the attention of certain people or to control a woman's body. James puts it in sexual language when he says you've been seduced and enticed by your lust and you played the adulterer. You have said no to your true husband, the marriage bed of grace and the intimacy with the Lord for a false one night stand that brings nothing but destruction, despair and death. As the temptation is joined with the desire it gives birth to sin and sin brings the death of a testimony, a family, a marriage and a death of all kinds of things. Don't be deceived my brothers and that's where we get to this capstone.

This is just one of fifty plus Gospel commands in the book of James, imperatives in the book of James. It is given in the negative. Do not be deceived my beloved brothers. Adam and Eve were deceived. Why? It was because they had a desire within them. Satan told them that if they wanted to be like God they should eat the fruit. They were already like God because they were made in His image. Their problem was they

had a greater desire and were willing to disobey God so that they might be God. So they were deceived. Do not be deceived my beloved brothers.

Then he moves from a negative to a positive explanation of how not to be deceived. He doesn't put your eyes horizontally but he puts them vertically. James 1:16-17a says *[16] Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. [17] Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights...* Don't be deceived when the trials of life come. You gain wisdom by asking the Lord for it, by prayer. The second thing he says is that you want to be ready for the test. When you know there is a test you are supposed to study for it but you decide to go out and play so when the test comes the next morning you are not ready. The problem is not the test. The problem is that you're not ready. Don't be deceived, be ready. To help you get ready you get your eyes off the horizontal and you put them on the vertical. You want to see your God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

James starts off with God as your Sustainer, your Provider for every good and perfect gift comes from above. What does the statement 'every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of light' tell you? Parents you're probably saying things to your unconverted children and wondering 'is anything getting through to them'? You will be amazed at what is getting through. James doesn't get converted until after the resurrection and here in this statement he is using language he must have listened in on at the Sea of Galilee in Capernaum when he heard the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus said "if your earthly fathers who are evil know how to give good gifts how much more will your heavenly Father give." James is using Sermon on the Mount language right here.

When James says every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights it tells you three things. Every good and perfect gift comes from above. It is a gift of grace. God may use believers and unbelievers to write an extraordinary piece of music but it really came from God through them. That was common grace giving them the opportunity to do that, giving them the ability to do that. You may read a great book but that author was given that ultimately by God giving them that. Every good and perfect gift that has come into your life is from above, an act and provision of God's grace. God, your Sustainer, in His work of Providence has brought that into your life. The second thing it tells us is if God gives the gift then it's good and perfect. The third thing it is telling us is that tests are good and perfect gifts from above. Don't be deceived.

Don't believe someone who stands in the pulpit and says the reason you're going through adversity right now is because you don't believe Jesus enough. That's deception. That is someone telling you that your problem is that you don't have enough faith. No, God brings problems. They are good and perfect gifts. It is just like He did with Abraham and Daniel. He has brought this for a reason. Don't be deceived. Good and perfect gifts come from above in a sin-cursed world that God is using in multi-faceted ways in your life to show you where you are so you can hold fast, show you what you need to know so that you can grow and expose the strongholds of any hidden idolatry or over desires in your life that need to be killed. That is a good and perfect gift and not a failure of your faith, the fact that you're going through adversity. Do not be deceived.

Here is a second thing James tells us. He goes from God as Sustainer to God as Creator. Every good and perfect gift comes by grace from Your Father. Every good and perfect gift comes from your Father and that includes testing in this life. Now James 1:17 says *[17] Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from*

the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. He is calling on Psalm 79 and Psalm 136. The lights are referring to just one aspect of the creation, the sun, the moon, and the stars. How did they get there? They are not cosmic accidents for they are flung into place and maintained by the spoken word of God. He put them there and they are glorious gifts. They are not all the gifts but it's just one of them.

God your Creator has put the evidence of His presence, goodness, beauty, and His Truth as He put the sun, the moon and the stars in the universe but don't fix on them for they can get shadows. Suns get eclipsed. Stars and moons get covered with clouds. That's why we sing the hymn trace the rainbow through the rain. Don't put your focus on the gifts – your marriage, your children, your job, your home, your country for those are good and perfecting gifts in your life from above but they all can be moved, eclipsed, covered or shifting shadows. Put your mind and heart on the One true and living God who gives the good and perfect gifts in His providence and who put those things in place. There is no shifting shadow with Him. That is your fix point, right there.

He is putting you from the horizontal to the vertical. He is God your Provider and God your Creator. This is the One whom you trust, not the gifts. You thank the Lord for the gifts and enjoy the gifts. You enjoy the gifts for His glory and you enjoy the gifts as He has given them but you don't make any of them your fix point. Do not be deceived for a wife can't save you, a marriage or children can't save you. The things of this world are in a sin-cursed world and they cannot satisfy. It is the Provider and the Creator that you fix yourself upon. So James has gone from God as your Provider, to your Sustainer, to your Creator.

Then he moves to God is your Redeemer, your redemption. James 1:18 says *[18] Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.* He is saying do not be deceived my beloved brothers. God is your Provider so fix on your Provider, not the provisions. The God who created all these good and perfect gifts that surround you enjoy them but do not put your hope in them. Your hope is in the One who doesn't change. He cannot be eclipsed. He does not shift. He is not shadowed. Now do you know how you got to be a beloved brother? You have been born again and by His own will He brought you forth for a purpose that you might be the first fruits of all His creatures, all of those whom He made in His image.

I could not get out of this verse in James 1:18 and I want to give you five things out of this simple statement. The first thing is that every person who is a true believer, a true beloved brother is born again. You were born dead in your sins and you have been brought from death unto life. Paul says it, Jesus said it to Nicodemus, Peter says it and the writers of the Scripture are saying this. It's not get saved to be born again. The only way you can be saved is by being born again because you're dead. So every single one of you that know the Lord, all my beloved brothers in the Lord, you are walking testimonies that God's grace has brought you from death unto life. You have been born again.

The second thing is that there are two instruments of your new birth. When Jesus told Nicodemus how to be saved He said "You must be born again of the Holy Spirit." Peter and James made sure we understood that the Holy Spirit uses the Word of Truth. You must be born again by the Spirit and with the Word. You are saved by faith. Faith comes by hearing the Word of Truth so the parents that brought you forth in your new

birth are the Holy Spirit with the Word of God, the Word of Truth. So somebody brought you the Truth and God's Spirit gave you the ability to hear it and you were born again, brought from death unto life.

The third thing is that this is all a gift of His grace. It is just like those good and perfect gifts that come from above. The lights that you look at came from His spoken Word. It says of His own will He brought us forth in James 1:18. You have been born again by the grace of God. You needed Him but you didn't want Him. He didn't need you but He wanted you and He brought you from death unto life by grace. His unmerited, unstoppable, relentless grace brought you into life.

The fourth thing is that grace by definition is sovereign. God in His own free will set you free from the bondage of your will that you could come to Him for salvation. He set you free that you might believe and repent in Christ. Why did He do it? He did it out of His own free will, un-coerced, unmerited, unstoppable, relentless grace of His love sovereignly bestowed upon us.

Here is the fifth thing. The other day I was in a discussion on this heinousness that we legally now approve and promote in the taking of unborn life in this country and the person said "Pastor, I don't believe it is right until the baby is viable." I said "When is the baby viable?" "Well, when you take them home." "I don't know about you but I have taken three home and I don't know one that was viable after I took them home." Every one of them had to be fed, clothed, cleaned and taught. They weren't viable. You didn't bring your children home to say "You raise yourself." They had to be taught and raised in wisdom and stature in favor with God and favor with man.

So when you are born again you are babies on a journey of growth in wisdom with the Lord so be a learner from the Word of Truth that brought you forth. Your parents brought you forth physically. The Holy Spirit and the Word of Truth brought you forth. Surrender to the Spirit in prayer and dig into God's Word that you can grow as a new born babe in Christ. You are not without the need of teaching, parenting and growing in the Lord.

That leads us to a conclusion of the capstone and the foundation. James has finally summed these up about these trials. Don't be deceived and this is how you can lay hold of wisdom. First, in prayer ask Him for wisdom and secondly get into the Word of Truth with your Fixed Point, your God as your Creator, your Redeemer and your Sustainer. James 1:19 will take this Word of Truth and says don't just be hearers of the Word but be doers also. This is a foundation stone as to what you will do with the Word in wisdom as we get to James 1:19 and beyond.

It's also a capstone so I want to cap it up by making these three simple statements and then the takeaway. Beloved brothers, in light of what James has said, Satan will, can and does attempt to deceive the brothers. When the trials of life come Satan wants them to become temptations. Therefore just like he did in the garden, like he attacked Jesus in the wilderness, he comes with false promises, twisted Scripture from all kinds of places and he can even appear as an angel of light to us. He comes with false signs, wonders and miracles. Why would James say do not be deceived my beloved brothers if it wasn't possible?

Secondly, Christians therefore can be deceived, resulting in being shaken. Thirdly, Christians can and are called not to be deceived. You have a new heart, new life, new record, new family, new home and Jesus your Lord and Savior. He has given

you the Holy Spirit who has given you His power within you. He has given you prayer to ask for wisdom but you did not get a new mind. You are called to renew your mind. You need wisdom and the wisdom is found in the Word of Truth. The first thing to know is your God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Get the fixed point in place.

So here is the takeaway. The inevitable deceptions of Satan are foundationally repelled by a Biblical, accurate and intimate knowledge of God as your Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Satan inevitably will attempt to deceive you. He will do it in all kinds of way and out right blasphemous efforts. Why is it that believers falter in the days of trial? I find two reasons here. One, is out of fear, being fearful of what will happen if I remain faithful and the second is false lovers seducing you. Those are the two that cause believers to be deceived.

There is a foundational reason why those two reasons succeed in our life. The foundational reason is that we haven't taken the time to pray and get into the Word to be equipped so that we're not deceived in that day. We haven't taken the time to make the commitment to get into the Word of Truth so that we can know God. When I know God whom shall I fear? You are my Rock, my fixed point, my Shield, see my Savior! He took the fiery darts of Satan for me. Look at the dents in the shield for those were the thunderbolts of God's judgment that were due to me but Christ took my place. Whom shall I fear? He is my Shield.

Who can love my soul? There are many that will use my body, my abilities and this and that and Satan can deceive me with false lovers and one night stands but I have a Savior, a marriage feast and an eternity with the One who loves me, will never leave me nor forsake me. I have a true Lover of my soul. I need to know my Triune God as my Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. I need to know Him Biblically because I need to know Him accurately. Even in eternity you will never know Him exhaustively, but you can know Him Biblically, accurately, intimately and personally.

Would you pray and insist that the pulpit ministry of this congregation that if I die tomorrow that the next one in it, like the one I followed, and by God's grace falteringly but hopefully growingly the one that is in it now that it is a Christ-centered, Trinity-exalting, Gospel-saturated, Bible preaching ministry to equip you for the days of trial because you know the Word of Truth? When you know the Word of Truth then you know the God of the Word of Truth. That is what you pray for. That is what you insist on. I don't need someone to coach me up or therapy but what I need is sixteen ounces to the pound of Bible truth of my Triune God revealed in Christ, saturated with the Gospel and make sure it's there. Don't waver or stop when I frown. Don't start for my smile. Preach for the smile of God from the pulpit of Briarwood to equip God's people so when they get up the next morning and face the test they are ready. They know their God. Make sure it's God centered, Trinity revealing Christ centered.

I am not saying this because I want a big crowd every Sunday. Prioritize the preaching of the Word, your reading and study of the Word of Truth and your prayers in asking God for wisdom. Prioritize that intentionally, please. You have the mind of Christ that is preached for you so that your mind is renewed. Be like those Bereans for they heard the Word with eagerness, examining the Scriptures every day to see if these things are true. So insist, prioritize that the majesty of the glory of your God is revealed in the preeminence of Christ by the Holy Spirit who indwells you and the Father and you know the One who will defend you with His life. Whom shall I fear? With His life He

gave you life. Why would I go to any false lover? Banish fear and give me my God. Send away the idolatrous love of spiritual adultery. Give me my Savior, my Bridegroom who loves me, clothes me, and perfects me with providence, creation and redemption.

Amazingly you have an inheritance. You are going to be with this God. Right now you have a down payment of the inheritance but you have the full payment that is coming. I have something even greater. Don't be deceived my brothers for you not only have an inheritance, according to this text you are His inheritance. You are the first fruits. The first fruits were brought in praise and worship to the saving, sustaining hand of God. The tithe is the statement of the first fruits. You brought it and said "Everything I have You gave to me and the first fruits is my way to tell You in worship and that means You have me." You are the first fruits and there is coming a day when you go to your inheritance for you will be taken by the Father and given to Jesus as His inheritance. You are the first fruits, sacred to the Lord. Fix your eyes on Him. There is your fixed point. Your Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer makes you an overcomer by His grace. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You so much for the moments to be in Your Word. Thank You Father, for the majesty and glory of the Scriptures. Thank You that James does not dodge this issue of the trials of life or making false promises that if we believe You then the trials of life will disappear. Thank You that he has not only informed us of the inevitability and multi-faceted nature of them but he has also pointed us to the means of wisdom, prayer and the Word and the fountain fixed point of wisdom, our Triune God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. You may be reading this today and the trials of life will not disappear for you are in a sin-cursed world and the answer is not found in money, power or sex. The answer is not rebellion against God. The answer is to come to a God that has loved you and given His Son for you who will never leave you nor forsake you and will take what the world will design to destroy you and Satan to deceive you and design it to grow you in His grace to present you to Himself in glory. All you need to do is come. Nothing in my hands I bring, to Christ and His cross I cling. Dear Jesus, enable anyone reading this who has not done that to do that today and then enable Your people to grow in grace with their eyes fixed upon their Triune God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.