Faith Foundations

September 2021

This section is James 1 Parts 1, 2 and 3

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**Faith Foundations 2021-2022**

**The Catholic Epistles**

**James 1:1-11**

**In this week’s session, we will be introduced to the book of James, which has an interesting interpretive history, especially in Lutheran circles. As we read through the book, we will discuss in detail some of the issues that arise from the text. For now, though, we will do some introductory work and read the first half of chapter 1.**

**For starters, who was James? Why is this not as easy of a question to answer as we might think at first?**

**Do some research online or in a study Bible to find out who the author is traditionally thought to be. What are some of the possibilities?**

**Ultimately, the question of the authorship of James is of minor importance. Clearly, he was someone who was respected in the early church; otherwise, his simple name attached to the greeting of the letter would not have been sufficient for it to be read in churches and ultimately used as Scripture. James clearly possessed a measure of apostolic authority, which is why his letter was circulated in the early church as widely as it was.**

**Read James 1:1. How does James describe himself? What does this remind his readers about his authority, and from whom his authority is derived?**

**To whom does James address his letter? What do the terms “the twelve tribes” and “the Dispersion” mean?**

**How do James’ addressees establish his letter as a “Catholic Epistle?”**

**Read James 1:2-4. How should Christians respond when they encounter trials? Why?**

**What kinds of trials do Christians typically encounter in life? What kinds of trials might have been more significant back when James wrote his letter?**

**Have you ever experienced a greater steadfastness in faith as a result of trials you have undergone?**

**Read James 1:5-8. What does it mean to “lack wisdom?” What types of things might a person who lacks wisdom do?**

**How can a person obtain wisdom? Does James portray this as an easy or hard thing to do?**

**How should we ask God for wisdom (or for anything, for that matter)? What is very important for us NOT to do?**

**Is it easy always to have absolute confidence that God will give us everything for which we ask, without any doubts? Why or why not?**

**How should we understand the word “doubt” in this passage? How does James’ description of a doubter as a “double-minded man” and “unstable in all his ways” help us understand how he is using the word “doubt?”**

**How should you handle your doubts if you have trouble believing everything that God promises? Read Mark 9:14-29, especially verse 24, for some insight into this question.**

**Read James 1:9-11. Who is the “lowly brother” to whom James refers? How has he been exalted in the church?**

**How have the rich in the church experienced “humiliation?”**

**Why is it so important for both the lowly and the rich to boast in their conditions?**

**How does the metaphor of the sun and the grass describe the pursuits of the rich? What should they be doing instead of seeking greater wealth for themselves?**

**As you can see from these initial verses from James, this book is very practical and full of wisdom about how to handle concrete situations that arise in our lives of faith. James does appear to be rather strict, some might say harsh, but he certainly does not shy away from the realities of trials, doubting, temptations, and sin. For that reason he gives us valuable insights about how to handle times when we may be beset by those difficulties.**

**Faith Foundations 2021-2022**

**The Catholic Epistles**

**James 1:12-21**

**In today’s session, we will continue our discussion of the first chapter of the book of James. In this passage, James provides some additional insights to people who are experiencing trials and temptations.**

**Read James 1:12-15. According to James, who particularly is blessed? Why?**

**How might these have been comforting words to James’ readers? How are they comforting words to us Christians today?**

**What types of trials do we experience today that are similar to those of the ancient church?**

**How is a person NOT tempted to sin? How is a person actually tempted?**

**How should we understand the Fifth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer (“And lead us not into temptation”) in light of this passage? Luther’s explanation to this petition in the Small Catechism is helpful here.**

**What is the ultimate root of sin? Do you ever see this playing out in your own life?**

**What is the end result of sin? Why do Christians need to be concerned about this, and why do they NOT need to at the same time?**

**Read James 1:16-18. From whom does every good and perfect gift come?**

**How does James describe God in this passage? Why is it comforting to know that He does not change?**

**What does it mean that God “brought us forth?” What does it mean that we are “a kind of firstfruits of His creatures?”**

**What role does the Word of God play in the gifts God has given us?**

**Read James 1:19-21. How should believers conduct themselves in regards to hearing and speaking? Are we ever tempted to do the opposite of what James says here?**

**What does James have to say about anger? When are we tempted to anger?**

**When do we try to pass off our anger as a “righteous” thing? How should we respond to such situations instead?**

**How can we sinners “put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness?” Are there certain “levels” of sin that would fall under that category, but not others? How can we tell the difference?**

**How should we receive the Word of God? What does that mean in practice?**

**What does it mean that the Word is “implanted” in us? How does this metaphor describe the coming of the Word to us and its work in us once we have received it?**

**What does the Word ultimately do for us?**

**This last section of James we have just read shows the seriousness with which James takes sin. Christians should strive to avoid sin at all costs in their lives. Later in the book, James will make some statements that might make some Christians (especially Lutherans) concerned about certain aspects of salvation in Jesus Christ. For now, though, such issues have yet to be fully brought into the open.**

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**The Catholic Epistles**

**James 1:22-27**

**In today’s session, we will finish the first chapter of James’ epistle. The passages we read in this session will begin to point the way toward some of the major interpretive challenges that we will encounter in the next chapter.**

**Read James 1:22-25. How should Christians respond to the Word? How should they NOT respond to the Word? What does this actually mean?**

**What is a person who is merely a “hearer” of the Word like? How does this show us the futility of looking to ourselves for the strength to live a faithfully Christian life?**

**Where should one who wishes to be a “doer” of the Word look to help himself avoid “forgetting?”**

**How should we understand James’ description of the Law as the “law of liberty?” From what exactly does it “liberate” us?**

**Read Romans 7:4-6. How does Paul describe the Law in this passage? Does the Law “liberate” us, or does it do something else?**

**Using the principles of our homologoumena/antilegomena distinction, how should we reconcile these two seemingly contradictory concepts from these two epistles?**

**How will the “doers” of the Word be blessed in their doing?**

**Read James 2:26-27. What must one do to ensure that his religion is not “worthless?”**

**What type of religion is “pure and undefiled?” How does this speak to the necessity of good works for Christians?**

**How does one keep oneself “unstained from the world?”**

**James gives us an excellent reminder that simply hearing God’s truth and not living our lives according to it is not how He would have us respond to His grace in Christ. In order to be faithful Christians, we must live in a manner that is pleasing to Him, and this means studying and obeying His Law. Even though we Lutherans rightly emphasize salvation by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ, we must also emphasize the sanctification (or making holy) that He accomplishes in us.**