

# JAMES RESHUFFLED

April 8, 2018

If you've ever been stuck in suffering with no relief in sight,  
There is one thing that you know for sure;  
I DON'T WANT TO LIVE THIS WAY!

That's good . . .

Because that's when we're most ready to listen,  
and God has something to say as we go to the Book of James this morning.

It's now about 10 years since the resurrection and Pentecost.  
Jesus followers have recovered from the shock and awe of the resurrection.  
Many people are believing and being baptized.  
In fact, three thousand were added to their number on the day of Pentecost  
in response to Peter's electric, spirit-infused sermon.  
What an exciting time to be a Jesus follower!

But, at the time James writes this letter,  
the church was beginning to face massive persecution  
and had been forced to flee to all parts of the Greco-Roman world.  
They grappling to make sense of their faith in light of these painful realities.  
James needs to address their pain and confusion  
as his first order of business.

A note about how James thinks and writes.  
It's kind of a circular thinker.  
He's got about three topics that he keeps visiting, moving on, revisiting, moving on.  
So, to help me get a handle on his thinking,  
I've reshuffled his letter so that the topics flow more in lines than in circles.

**James Reshuffled was the result**

I'll make it available to all of you online,  
hoping that the wisdom in James will jump out at us in a fresh way  
simply by reading it in this reshuffled order.

So here we go!

<sup>1:1</sup> James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.  
To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

**So who is this James?**

Someone who radically changed his idea of who Jesus was.

You see James grew up with Jesus, his younger half-brother.  
If anyone's going to refuse to acknowledge you're the Son of God,  
It's your brother!  
And in fact, before the resurrection  
James would have only rolled his eyes at such a claim.

If you'll remember, at one point, Jesus is in this combative relationship with the religious leaders, who are even accusing him of being demon possessed!

Jesus' mother and brothers . . .

Mark 3:21

heard *about this*, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said,  
"He is out of His mind." . . .

So what convinced James to change his mind about his brother?

Jesus' outstanding teaching?

His exemplar life?

His miracles?

Apparently NOT.

What convinced him . . . was the resurrection.

James experienced the Risen Jesus and crossed over into belief.

So he's writing this letter to the scattered believers.

Resisting the temptation of name-dropping

I the *brother* of Jesus . . .

But simply, I, the servant of God and of Jesus.

**And James acknowledges they got off to a great start.**

<sup>1:18</sup> He chose to give us birth through the word of truth,  
that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

But then their faith is about to topple  
because God isn't doing what they expected him to do.

Suffering – in its myriad of forms –  
Unexpected hardships in health, finances  
Painful truths exposed  
Relational conflicts  
Devastating losses  
shows up unexpected and unwanted.

How many of you had a Jack-in-the-Box when you were a kid?  
All around the mulberry bush . . . “Pop Goes the Weasel.”  
That’s how most of us start out thinking about God – It’s God-in-a-box!  
He stays in the box until . . .  
“I’m furiously turning the handle, Lord  
Come on, pop up!  
Solve my problem!”  
Problem solved, blessing attained,  
and we stuff Him back down in the box till I need you again.

The Father wants to move on from being children in our faith,  
to being mature in our faith.  
And James reminds us that God does this through . . .  
you’ve got it . . . suffering.

<sup>1:3</sup> The testing of your faith produces perseverance.

<sup>4</sup> Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete,  
not lacking anything.

Maturity isn’t what you know,  
it’s what you can endure and still hold onto the character of God  
*and* your own character.

And God knows how to design the *precise* tool needed to mature *you*.

That’s why you can . . .

<sup>1:2</sup> Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds.

Father, are you serious?

I’m mad; hurt; confused; grieved.  
I know. I’m here and I love you.  
I don’t deserve this.  
I know. I’m growing your faith.  
I just need to pray this away!  
Not yet, you’ve got lots to learn first.  
But what about *HIM*, *HER*. Aren’t you going to fix *THEM*?  
Let’s just talk about you.

The Father doesn’t leave me any wiggle room for self-pity. NONE!

OK, if I can't get away with being indignant at other people.  
maybe it's *God's* fault.  
James says. . .

### Never conclude that God has become your adversary

<sup>1:13</sup> When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; <sup>14</sup> but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. <sup>15</sup> Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

God didn't let you down.  
God didn't disappear.  
God's not mad at you.

I often hear,  
God won't give me more than I can endure.  
But then what you're having to endure,  
*more* than you can handle!  
And you feel justified to RUN!

When we say this, we have misunderstood the Father.  
He doesn't plan to reduce the trial to match your strength,  
He plans to increase your strength to match the trial.

<sup>16</sup> Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. <sup>17</sup> Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

### God is still good – ALL the time

The one thing that NEVER changes is God's character

Then James see another root problem in our response to suffering.  
We've gotten the price tags all mixed up cause we've forgotten . . .

**Jesus' upside-down, right-side up world**  
We keep rejoicing in all the wrong things.

If you're suffering tremendous financial difficulties – rejoice in your poverty!

<sup>1:9</sup> Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position.

If you're rich, rejoice in the humbling realization that it'll all soon be gone!

<sup>10</sup> But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. <sup>11</sup> For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

<sup>5:1</sup> Now listen you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. <sup>2</sup> Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. <sup>3</sup> Your gold and silver are corroded.

If your entire value system hasn't radically changed since knowing Jesus,  
you may not yet really know him.

So, enough with all the *wrong* responses to suffering.  
What's the *right* response?

**Ask for wisdom!**

<sup>1:5</sup> If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

What a change of perspective!  
Instead of wanting the problem to go away,  
I'm asking how to *respond* to the problem.

<sup>6</sup> But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. <sup>8</sup> Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

Hmm. The obstacle to getting wisdom is being double-minded.

What is meant to be double-minded? Consider:

I'm a problem solver.

I don't sit idly by when a problem presents itself.

I fix it!

Present me with a problem and within 10 second, I'll suggest the solution!  
Oh, ask God for wisdom? Of, course.  
Truth is – that's just a formality.

What I really want is for God to make me successful  
as I jump in to secure the outcome I'm sure God wants!

It's not that I'm double-mindedness about whether or not God answers prayer.  
It's that I'm double minded about whether or not I really need his advice.  
If I think I know what to do, he'll say, "OK, have at it."  
Come back when you're ready to listen."

We forget there's *always* something we can't see.

Illustration:

Samson, as you may remember, was quite a womanizer.

It upset his parents no end that he wanted to go after Philistine women.

But the writer of this story makes a surprising commentary,

His parents did not know that this was from the LORD, who was seeking an  
occasion to confront the Philistines; (Judg. 14:4)

This comment has always given me pause when I'm about to rush in  
with my righteous indignation to correct someone else's sin!

And here's something else I've discovered about surviving painful times.

If I *do* ask the Father for wisdom as to how to respond,

And then I *obey* the Father,

My fear, guilt and confusion subside, and peace emerges.

But how am I to recognize God's wisdom,

making sure it's not just me, projecting my own ideas onto God?

I'm really good at that!

**James tells us exactly what God's wisdom looks like.**

<sup>3:13</sup> Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. <sup>14</sup> But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. <sup>15</sup> Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. <sup>16</sup> For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

So here comes the check-list of what a wise response will look like:

<sup>17</sup> But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all

- ✓ pure
- ✓ peace-loving
- ✓ considerate
- ✓ submissive
- ✓ full of mercy and good fruit
- ✓ impartial and sincere

<sup>18</sup> Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

How well does that describe your plan for solving the problem?

To cap it off, the James gives us one KEY word in responding to suffering . . .

<sup>5:7</sup> **Be patient**, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. <sup>8</sup> You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

And when the waiting period just goes on TOO long,  
careful not to start the blame game . . .

<sup>9</sup> Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged.  
The Judge is standing at the door!

James, you set the bar pretty high!  
Is there *anyone* mature enough to pull this off?

<sup>10</sup> Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. <sup>11</sup> As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

No wiggle room.  
But *finally* we get to the part we're most eager for – the getting *rid* of the suffering . . .

**Through prayer!**

<sup>5:13</sup> Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup> Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup> And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.

Whatever the problem, be it sickness or any other problem,  
God doesn't want us to masochists.  
He does want to relieve the suffering.

So let's pray!  
We *like* this instruction – not so much the next.

<sup>16</sup> Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

I'd prefer to tell you my problem, not tell you my sin.  
I'd prefer to be a victim, not a perpetrator.  
I want your compassion, not so much need your mercy.

But God says, If we hide our sin, he won't hear our prayer.  
And he drives a nail into our pride.  
But then humility is the soil of answered prayer  
like the prayer of Elijah.

<sup>17</sup> Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. <sup>18</sup> Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

And with that we come back to where we started . . .

<sup>1:12</sup> Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

So as we come to the table of Jesus' suffering,  
We are humbled by our own complaints.  
Jesus modeled the wisdom of James:

When facing suffering . . .

- Rejoice that the Father is making you mature
- Remember, the Father is good – ALL the time
- Readjust your price tags to match those of Jesus
- Ask for a wise response to your suffering
- Be patient much longer than think is necessary
- Ask for prayer while confessing your sins