

Truths for the Valley

Week 41: October 8-14 — *James 1-5*

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Helpful Resources

James and the Sermon on the Mount (p.61)

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

This week we read the book of *James*, the half-brother of Jesus (*Matt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3*). James was a pillar of the early church and the leader of the Council of Elders in Jerusalem (*Acts 15:13; Gal. 1:19; 2:9*). Though he started out skeptical of Jesus as the Messiah (*Jn. 7:5*), he later believed when he witnessed Jesus' resurrection (*1 Cor. 15:7*). Historians have recorded that James was martyred in 62 AD (while Paul was imprisoned in Rome). He was thrown from the upper floor of the temple, then beaten to death with clubs.

Christ-followers were, of course, watched with suspicion and severely persecuted. Early on, Saul (later Paul) and other Pharisees made life difficult for Christians. In fact, when the persecution started, many believers scattered throughout Judea and the Roman Empire. James addressed his letter to his fellow countrymen and followers of Christ "dispersed abroad" (*Jas. 1:1*), and the first topic he addressed was how to view the trials they faced.

What's interesting about James' letter is how closely it resembles the teaching of Jesus, especially his message in the Sermon on the Mount (*Matt. 5-7*). To see the comparisons, observe the chart entitled, "*James and the Sermon on the Mount*." It makes sense. What should one say to a group of people experiencing great difficulty but the comforting and challenging words of Jesus, words with which they were all familiar? The truths that Jesus shared on the mountain, James applied in the valley. In this review, we will explore the connection between the two and apply their wisdom to our lives.

- Mountain Teaching, Valley Truths
 1. **The Blessing of Trials** (*James 1:22-25*): While no one looks forward to trials, especially trials of persecution, both Jesus and James pointed out their benefits (*Matt. 5:10-12*). What are they, and how do those benefits change our perspective?
 2. **The Importance of Prayer** (*James 1:5; 4:3; 5:13-18*): Prayer is simply communication with God. Though Jesus taught the importance of prayer (*Matt. 5:44; 6:5-13; 7:7-11*), how many Christians do not pray as they should? What are the benefits of prayer? What are the difficulties regarding prayer?
 3. **Uncontrolled Anger** (*James 1:19, 20; 4:1, 2*): We would not blame someone who gets angry for being persecuted (either at God or his persecutor), but both Jesus and James addressed the issue of uncontrolled anger (*Matt. 5:21, 22*). What are the dangers?
 4. **The Sin of Partiality** (*James 2:1-9*): While treating people differently (partiality) may be understandable, both Jesus and James said it is unacceptable (*Matt. 7:12*). We are to be friendly with all people but make alliances, or play favorites, with none. Why?

5. **Faith and Works** (*James 1:26, 27; 2:14-26; 3:11, 12*): Both Jesus and James warned of pretenders (*Matt. 6:1-18; 7:15-23*). They are everywhere! The only way to tell if one's root is good or godly is by the fruit they produce. One's "faith" is dead if it has no works. But couldn't a pretender fake their fruit? How can we tell if his faith is genuine?
 6. **Godly Wisdom** (*James 1:5, 21-25; 3:13-18*): Wisdom is most visible in the valley of trials (*Matt. 7:24*). How should God's people view the valleys? How should they respond? Where will they find their wisdom, from God or man? God's wisdom is best. Why?
 7. **Peacemakers** (*James 3:17, 18*): One sign of godly wisdom is being at peace with all people. Jesus said that peacemakers would be blessed (*Matt. 5:9*). What are the benefits of being at peace with all people? What helps produce peace? What endangers the peace?
- The Judgment in *James*

One of the subtle themes hidden in the background of James' letter is that of judgment. Here are some examples.

"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." *James 1:12*

"Speak and act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty, for judgment will be merciless for the one who has shown no mercy..." *2:12, 13*

"Let not many of you, my brethren, become teachers, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment." *3:1*

"There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and destroy..." *4:12*

"It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!" *5:3*

"Do not complain against one another, so that you yourselves will not be judged. Behold, the Judge is standing right at the door!" *5:9*

One day, all people will give an account of themselves to God (*Heb. 9:27; Rom. 14:12*). But why would James use so many references to the judgment in his letter? Not only was he using the judgment as a motivation to righteous living, but he was also reminding God's people that their actions and words matter. Nothing goes without notice, if not by men, then by God. Also, James reminded his people that though they were in the midst of persecution, their persecutors would also be judged. Justice will be served in God's timing.

The Bottom Line

Jesus' teaching on the Mount are truths to be applied in the valley.

Questions to Consider

1. Share a truth that has been meaningful to you during a time when you were in a valley.
2. Why is the truth of the judgment of God good for us to remember?
3. If Christians are forgiven of their sins, then what will their judgment look like? Take a minute to read *1 Corinthians 3:9-15* to answer this question.
4. Which part of *James* was most encouraging or challenging for you? Explain why.