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*Saint Mark's Church
Sunday School
Servant's Meeting*

The epistle of Saint James

a) Introduction

This epistle is one of the seven Catholic epistles (James , 1st. and 2nd. Peter , 1st. , 2nd. and 3rd. John , and Jude) , which were written to the whole Church .

1)The writer

- a) The author identifies himself as ‘James, a bondservant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ’(1:1). Early Church traditions ascribe this letter to James , ‘the brother’ or ‘kinsman’ of our Lord, known as James the just.
- b) In the New Testament there are three persons named by ‘James’
1. James the son of Zebedee (*Mat. 10:2*). King Herod killed him ~ 44AD (*Acts 12:1*). It is most unlikely that the epistle was written by this date.
 2. James the son of Alphaeus (*Mat. 10:3*) . Many studies were carried to verify if he is ‘ James brother of the Lord’ or another person.
 3. James brother of the Lord (*Gal. 1:19*). Some suggested that he was not a believer while the Lord was on earth by flesh (*John 7:5*) , but converted by a post resurrection appearance of Christ (*1 Cor. 15:7*) , and gathered with the disciples in the upper room as mentioned in Acts 1:14.
- c) He was appointed by the apostles as the first bishop of Jerusalem (*Acts 12:17 , 21:17-18*), and preside over the council of Jerusalem ~50-51 AD (*Acts 15*) . Saint Paul called him one of the three pillars of the Church (*Gal. 2:9*).
- d) He lived an ascetic , strict and holy life . He spent most of his time praying and kneeling in the temple , so he was called ‘ camel-kneed’. The Jews considered him incorruptible, for his obedience to Moses law. He was called ‘Just’.
- e) The Jews threw him from the temple walls and then clubbed him to death ~ 62AD, because he confessed his faith in Jesus Christ.

2) Date of the epistle

It was written in the time of the Jews persecution to the Church (*Acts 4:1 , 5:17*) , and before the destruction of Jerusalem. Most probably it was written ~ 61-62 AD, when many heresies spread in the Church .

3) Recipients of the epistle:

To the ‘twelve tribes which are scattered abroad’(1:1). This may be understood as :

- 1] The Jews who were scattered outside the land of Israel , then converted to Christianity when attending the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem , or listen to the apostles and preachers (*Acts 14:1*). Those were persecuted harshly by their fellow Jews (*Acts 17:5-6*)

2] The Christians of the whole Church who are scattered in the world .

4) Major Theme:

The harmony of faith and works. Saint James highlights the fact that ‘ dead faith – one without works- does not save’, and moral behavior is important in our salvation.. He indicates also that ‘ the human will is not bypassed in salvation , grace does not nullify personal responsibility’.

5) Why it was written:

- 1) To encourage the Christians to endure trials and suffering.
- 2) To encourage the Christians to be firm in the practical faith of the Lord.
- 3) To emphasize that the faith is not a substitute of works.
- 4) To highlight the danger of some sins which may be counted as trivial sins.

6) The style of the epistle:

1. It is a practical epistle concentrates on the daily behavior.
2. A firm message uncover the fault and condemn it but in love.
3. A message that correlate the two Testaments. It has the spirit of the sermon on the mountain with many references to the OT prophets , as Elijah and Job (Ch. 5)

7) Saint Paul vs. Saint James ; faith vs. works.

Some considered the writings of Saint Paul about faith and works specially in the epistles to “Romans and Galatians” are contradicting the writings of Saint James in this epistle. This contradiction is only apparent, not real .When we study thoroughly the thoughts and words of the two apostles we find them in complete agreement , but the circumstances and emphasis are different.

1. Saint Paul the apostle of the gentiles, faced with Christian from Jewish origin insisting on returning back to ‘circumcision , purification rituals according to Moses law,...’ as an only way for salvation. So, he stresses the fact that there is no salvation or justification without the blood of Christ. But in all his epistles , Saint Paul emphasize the necessity of work as a sign of the faith (*Rom. 8:1 , 1Cor. 13:2 , Eph. 2:10*), moreover he regarded ‘love[which is work] ’ as greater than faith (*1Cor. 13:13*)
2. Saint James is talking to Christians who have to show their faith through good deeds. He cannot separate faith and deeds as they are two faces for one coin.(*Jam. 1:6 , 5:15*) .

b) The epistle

Chapter One:

1. Greetings	1:1
2 Trials , and Temptations	1:2-18
a)Outward Trials	1:2-11
How to face these trials:	
1. With patience , perseverance and this leads to joy	1:2-4
2. Through asking and accepting the heavenly wisdom	1:5

3. Through faith	1:6-8
4. With humility	:9
5. Through recognition of the worthlessness of the world	1:10-11
b) Inward temptations	1:12-18
1. God is not tempting any one but He is the source of blessings	1: 13,17
2. Steps of temptation are: + draw by, and entice by desires, + give birth to sin + resulting death.	1: 14-15
3. The reward for endurance of temptation is the crown of life	1:12
4. God through His grace born us again, and make us the first born of His creation.	1:18
3. Examples of temptations , and how to deal with them	1:19-27
1. Rush in speaking	1:19
2. Wrath	1:19-20
3. Filthiness and overflow of wickedness	1:21
4. Deceiving one's self	1:22
5. Forgetting the word of God	1:22-24
6. Uncontrollable tongue	1:26
4. Ways to overcome temptation	
1. Implanting the word of God in the heart.	1:21
2. Doer of the word of God	1:22,26
3. Visitation of orphans and widows in their troubles	1:27
4. Keeps one's self unspotted from the world	1:27

Chapter Two

Faith and Works

1. Faith is against favoritism at worship	2:1-13
a) The seating of the rich and the poor in the Church	2:1-4
b) The poor people in this world are rich in faith	2::5
c) The majority of rich people create problems	2:6,7
d) Favoritism of the rich is against the law	2:8-12
e) Despising the poor , deprive us from the Lord's mercy	2:13
2. Faith distinguished through good deeds	2:14-26
a) The dead faith is not enough for salvation	2:14
b) Two examples of dead faith	2:15-18
c) The believe of demons	2:19
d) Two examples of true faith (Abraham & Rahab)	2:20-24
e) Faith and works are like spirit and body	2:25

Chapter Three

Examples of the behavior of faithful people: Controlling the tongue and be filled of heavenly wisdom

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|---|----------------|
| 1. The Tongue | 3:1-12 |
| a) Desire of teaching , and its judgement | 3:1-2 |
| b) How dangerous is the tongue ? | 3:2-6 |
| c) How to control the tongue? | 3:7,8 |
| d) The contradictory speech | 3:9-12 |
| 2. The true wisdom | 3:13-18 |
| a) The behavior of the wise person | 3:13 |
| b) The earthly wisdom | 3:14-16 |
| c) The heavenly wisdom | 3:17-18 |

Chapter Four

The believers and earthly desires

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|---|-----------------|
| 1. The earthly desires deprive us from peace, and answered prayers | 4:1-3 |
| 2. Adultery | 4:4-10 |
| a) Adultery is a result of the friendship of the world | 4:4 |
| b) The Spirit is jealous to return us back to the Lord | 4:5,6 |
| c) Pride is a cause of adultery | 4:6 |
| d) Ways to overcome adultery | 4:7-10 |
| 3. Criticizing others | 4: 11-12 |
| 4. Being overly confident | 4:13-17 |
| a) Our lives are like vapor | 4:14 |
| b) The will of God before our planning | 4:15 |
| c) Arrogance is a from evil | 4:16 |
| d) New understanding of sin | 4:17 |

Chapter Five

Warning to rich oppressors and General advises

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| 1. Warning to rich oppressors | 5:1-6 |
| a) The fate of the unjust rich | 5:1-3 |
| b) Examples of the unjust behavior of the rich | 5:4-6 |
| 2. General advises | 5:7-20 |
| a) Be patient until the coming of the Lord | 5:7-8 |

b) Do not grumble	5:9
c) Look for the Prophets as an example	5:10-11
d) Do not swear	5:12
e) How the believer react in case of tribulations	5:13
f) How the believer react in case of joy	5:13
g) How the believer react in case of sickness	5:14-16
h) How the believer react in case of sin	5:16
i) The power of faithful prayer	5:16-18
j) The reward of restoring the apostate	5:19-20

MAIN Issues In The EPISTLE

1. Humility

- ❖ St. James counts himself a bondservant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ'(1:1) although he was the brother of our Lord (either His cousin or the son of St. Joseph from previous marriage).
- ❖ The rich people need more to be humble as the sun of tribulations will cause them to be withered (1:10-11)
- ❖ The Lord is against the proud but gives the humble grace (4:6)[see also Prov. 3:34]

2. Testing of Faith

- ❖ Trials normally comes from outside . They come suddenly without warning , as persecution for the sake of faith , illness , death of a member of the family , materialistic losses , failure of business ,..... [refer to Job as an example] . But temptation is a result of inner uncleanness and fall in the traps of Satan.
- ❖ Trails must be counted as one of the sources of Joy (1:2), because they are like fire which test the gold of our lives (our faith in Christ) . They produce patience and announces our perfection in Christ .(1:2-3).
- ❖ Failure in enduring trials indicates that we lake wisdom(1:5). Wisdom acquired through faith.(1:6)
- ❖ Faith is a prerequisite for any granted request. Faith without doubt is a state of the mind and heart of the believes , who accept the authentic word of God and live with it and practice it.(1:6-7)
- ❖ Our Lord is the merciful God who is always Good regardless of our unfaithfulness . He is the lover of mankind regardless of the trials He send to us (1:13)

3. Temptation

- ❖ Temptation is a result of the person's inner desires which are not controlled by the Spirit (1:14). These desires go wild through Satan influence as he uses the media, the unchristian environment ,..... to deceit our conscious and senses . The Lord's victory in the wilderness (Mat. 4). is for all of us to overcome all what is in the world (1John 2:16-17). So our Lord is not tempting us (1:13), but eager for our salvation and victory over temptation.
- ❖ Temptation occurs in two cases; (V.14) when we ;
 1. attracted to sin and fail to resist its desires through the grace and power of our Lord .
 2. imagine that evil things are joyful and lasting.

- ❖ There are three stages of sin:
 1. Desire calling (v. 14) - Sin in the heart (thoughts are not practiced)
 2. Sin born (v. 15) - Sin practiced
 3. Death resulted (v. 15) - Sin as a habit

- ❖ These stages of sin may be symbolized by the three dead people whom our Savior raised from dead
 1. Raising of Jairus' daughter (Mark5:35-43), while she still in the house.
 2. Raising widow's son (Luke 7:11-16), while he was in the way to the tomb.
 3. Raising Lazarus (John 11:38-46) after three days of his death

4. Types of sins (as mentioned in this epistle)

Sin	Remedy
1. wrath (1:19-20)	1. swift to hear, 2. slow to speak,
2. all filthiness and overflow of wickedness (1:21-22)	1. receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.
3. Sins of the tongue (1:26, 3:3:2, 5-12) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Not controlled ❖ Stumbling words, it is like a fire, uncontrollable (and no man can tame the tongue)	1. Get help and support from heaven to tame the tongue and "accept the new man"
4. bitter envy and self-seeking in the hearts (3:14-16)	1. Get wisdom that is from above (3:17-18)
5. Dealing with others in partiality, specially in the church (2:1-13)	Remember that we will be <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1: judged according to the law of liberty. 2. judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy.
6. Loving to become teachers (3:1-13)	1. Remember that we shall receive a stricter judgment.
7. Desires and Lusts (4:1-4) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Desires for pleasure, lusts, killing, fighting others. ❖ Adultery 	Repent and remember these steps for repentance (4:6-9) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Submit to God 2. Resist the devil 3. Draw near to God 4. Cleanse your hands 5. Purify your hearts 6. Lament and mourn 7. Humble yourself.
8. Speaking evil against others (4:11-12)	1. Remember yourself. who are you to judge?
9. Being, overly confident (4:13-16)	1. Remember that our lives are vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away

Sin	Remedy
10 Getting wealth through fraud (5:1-8)	1. Remember the next coming of the Lord
11 Grumble against one another (5:11)	1. Remember the good examples of patience
12. swearing (5:12)	1. Remember the Judgment day

5. Faith and Deeds

- ❖ The believers are justified by Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and their Faith is justified by works. Both St. Paul and St. James used Abraham as an example. St Paul see him justified by faith when he accepted the word of God and believed it (Rom. 4:1-25) before he received the covenant of circumcision or the law. St James see his faith justified when he obeyed the Lord and offered his son sacrifice to the Lord.(James 2:14-26)
- ❖ The first step in accepting Christ is FAITH and this is “the condition” to be baptized and join the “Body of Christ” (Acts 2:38 ; 8:36-37)
- ❖ The believer who accepted Christ in faith and lived in the grace of our Lord have to practice the obedience of the commandments . He is confronted with the traces of the “old man” inside himself , the desires of the world and the traps of the devils . So, he have to struggle till the blood against sin to live victorious as his Master (Heb. 12:1-2 , 4).
- ❖ The believer also have to struggle - through the grace of the Lord - to grow up in the knowledge of our Lord (2 Pet.3:18), in goodness , in righteousness , in love and in the fullness of the Holy Spirit which will beautifying him with His fruits and gifts.(Eph. 3:16-19 ; 5:18 ; Gal.5:22-23)
- ❖ In the last day there will be two gates to go through to reach heaven
 1. faith in Jesus Christ the Saviour and the Father who send Him (John 5:24).
 2. doing good deeds (John 5:29 , Mat. 25:31-46)
- ❖ There are differences between the works of the law which St. Paul attacked in his epistles , and the works which are needed as the results of faith .

The works of the Law	The works of faith
1. The person do them with his own power and abilities	1.The Lord is working within us through His Holy Spirit (Phil. 2:13)
2 The person will be justified by them (Ezek. 20:11 ; Rom. 10:5 ; Gal.3:12)	2. We working with Him (1 Cor. 3:9)
3. No one was able to fulfill the commandments of the law and justified (<i>Rom. 3: 9 -12 , 20</i>)	3. We are created in Jesus Christ for good works (<i>Eph. 2:10</i>)
	4. These good works are signs of our faith (<i>Acts 26:20 ; Tit. 2:7 ; Heb.10:24 ; James 2:17-26 ; 1John 3:10 , 18</i>)

6. The Wisdom

there are two types of wisdom:

1. Earthly wisdom	2. Heavenly wisdom
1. Using the available knowledge only to processing the available data , manipulating them to personal benefits.	1. Jesus Christ is the “Wisdom of God” (<i>1Cor. 1:30</i>) , He is the Hypostasis of wisdom (<i>Proverbs 8:12-36</i>)
2. The Characteristics of this wisdom are : sensual, demonic , full of envy and self-seeking , confusion and every evil thing . (<i>James 3:15-16</i>)	2. This wisdom is a gift for whoever asks in faith (<i>James 1:5-6</i>).
3. The results of this wisdom are: bitter envy and self-seeking in the hearts (<i>James 3:14</i>)	3. The aim of this wisdom is accept the will of God in our lives and go through the trials in joy to win the crown of life (<i>James 1:2-12</i>)
4. The Lord counts this wisdom as foolishness and the thoughts of the wise as futile. (<i>1 Cor. 3:19</i>)	4. The Characteristics of this wisdom are : pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. (<i>James 3:17</i>)
	5. The results of this wisdom are : we discover ourselves as weak , ignorant and worthless , but we boast in God (<i>1Cor. 1:31</i>) as we are His sons and able to do everything in Jesus Christ (<i>Phil.3:34</i>)

7. Practical advises to the believers

- ❖ Be patient until the coming of the Lord (*5:7*). Jesus is coming soon (*2Pet. 3:9-10*) , and He will reward each one according to his/her deeds (*Rom.2:6*)
- ❖ Prayer is the medicine for suffering .(*5:13*). The prayer is the gate to heaven and the key to the heart of our Lord. This is evident from all these commandments : “pray always” (Luke 18:1). “Watch and pray” (*Mat.26:28*) ; “pray without ceasing” (*1Thess. 5:17*). There are many types of prayers :the Psalm prayers , the arrow prayers , the Liturgy prayers and the personal prayers. From the heart ,in faith ,in the name of Jesus Christ and according to His will are the keys for acceptable prayers.
- ❖ Singing is the melody of the cheerful believers (*5:13*). The Lord is “Enthroned in the praises of Israel” (Psalm 22:3), and His people offer Him always the sacrifice of praise (*Heb. 13:11*). In the church singing and praising are the main parts of the Liturgical life. In heaven, singing and praising the Lamb of God will be our whole life (*Rev. 5:5:9-14*)
- ❖ The miraculous healing of the body is available to the believers through the prayers of the priests , the faith of the sick and the priests in the sacrament of “anointing the sick”(*5:14-16*).The healing of the soul and forgiveness of sins are granted to the sick believer as he/she

repent and confess (5:16 ; 1John 1:9 ; Prov. 28:13) . There is also the gift of healing which is given from the Holy Spirit to chosen believers .(1Cor. 12:9 ; Mark 16:17-18) .

- ❖ Share the Lord and the church in returning back the sinners to the truth and remember the value of this work “ *save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins*”(5:19-20). This group is rewarded in the last day “*they will shine like the stars forever and ever*” (Dan. 12:3)

May the directions and blessings of this epistle fills our hearts and minds to follow fully the commandments of the Holy Spirit to our lives.

Review questions

Please answer these questions using verses :

1. Greetings 1:1

Saint James counted himself as a ‘ bondservant = slave ’ to God and Lord Jesus Christ regardless of the family ties with Jesus. His enormous love to the Lord leads him to accept joyfully to surrender his will to God and became as a slave. Many of the apostles counted themselves ‘bondservants’ as Saint Paul (Rom.1:1 , Titus 1:1) , Saint Peter (2Pet. 1:1) , Saint Jude (Jude 1:1) .

2. Trails and Temptation

a) Trails are coming from outside suddenly without warning , as persecution for the sake of faith , illness , death of a member of the family , materialistic losses , failure of business ,..... [refer to Job as an example] . But temptation is a result of inner uncleanness and fall in the traps of Satan.

b) Trails must be counted as one of the sources of Joy , because it is a way of testing our faith in Christ , and announce our perfection in Christ .

Joy is a part of our spiritual path, highlight the occasions of joy from the following verse: Luke 2:10,11

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- 1 Pet. 1:8
- Phil. 4:4,5
- John 16:22
- Phil. 1:18
- Luke 15:7
- Rom. 12:15

c) Our Lord Jesus Christ permits testing our faith to upgrade our spiritual level and to give us a lot of spiritual fruits and gifts. He uses many ways to test our faith , please check the following verses and relate them to the testing of faith.

- 2 Cor. 13:5
- 1Tim. 5:8
- 1Tim. 6:10
- Mark 9:23

d) Patience is a partner in our spiritual path and leads to perfection ; check these verses

- Luke 8:15.....
- Luke 21:19
- Heb. 10:36
- Heb:12:1

e) Jesus is the Wisdom Of God (Pro. 8:12-36 , 1Cor. 1:30) . There is heavenly wisdom (Jam.3:17 , 1Cor. 2:6,7) , and earthly wisdom (1Cor. 2:4 , Jam. 3:14-16).All of us are in need to the heavenly wisdom to endure trails and perfected at the end. But this wisdom must be asked from God. The Lord promises us to answer our requests .

So, please ask , ask , ask

Mat. 7:7-10

John 14:13,14
John 16:24
I John 5:14-15

f) Faith is a prerequisite for any granted request. Faith without doubt is a state of the mind and heart of the believers , who accept the authentic word of God and live with it and practice it. Read the following verses and check accordingly your faith

Mark 9:23
John 20:31
Gal. 6:22
2Kin. 7:1-2, 17

g) The heavenly wisdom takes off my pride , and replaces it with a true feeling that I am worthless .It substitutes my ego with the model of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ “ *who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth.(Phil. 2:6-11)* . So, I exalt in my Lord Jesus Christ and not in my richness.

The sun of tribulations and trials increases the brightness of the believers , but destroy the people who are boosting in their rich, like the withered grass.(refer to Isa. 40:6,7 , Job 14:2)

h) Temptation is a result of the person’s inner desires which are not controlled by the Spirit . These desires go wild through Satan influence as he uses the media, the unchristian environment ,..... to deceit our conscious and senses . In the wilderness Jesus overcomes Satan and all his temptation for our sake (Mat. 4).His victory is for all of us to overcome all what is in the world (1John 2:16-17). So our Lord is not tempting us, but eager for our salvation and victory over temptation. The following verses guide us in the way to overcome temptation:

1 John 5:4-5
1Pet. 5:8-9
1Cor. 10:12-14

i)Our Lord is the merciful God who is Good always regardless of our unfaithfulness . He is the lover of mankind. Contemplate in the following verses to discover some of the great mercies of our God:

John 3:16
Eph. 2:8-9
John 15:14-16
John 14:2-3

j) Temptation occurs in two cases: (V.14)

3. drawn away ; when we attracted to sin and fail to resist its desires through the grace and power of our Lord .
4. enticing ; when we imagine that evil things are joyful and lasting.

There are three stages of sin:

- 4. Desire calling v. 14
- 5. Sin born v. 15
- 6. Death is the result v. 15

These three stages represent the three stages of sin:

- 1. Sin in the heart (thoughts are not practiced)
- 2. Sin practiced
- 3. Sin as a habit

These stages of sin may be symbolized by the three dead people whom our Savior raised from dead

- 6. Raising of Jairus’ daughter (Mark5:35-43) , while she still in the house.
- 7. Raising widow’s son (Luke 7:11-16) , while he was in the way to the tomb.
- 8. Raising Lazarus (John 11:38-46) after three days of his death

Check these situation and distinguish the different stages of falling:

- 1. Joseph at the house of Potphar (Gen. 39)
- 2. David and the woman Uria (2 Sam. 11)
- 3. Samson and Delilah (Jud. 16)

k) When we – through the grace of the Lord – overcome temptation , our Lord will crown us by the promised crown of life. Check which of the following rewords is/are applied to you personally.

Rev. 2:7,17,26

Rev. 3:5, 12, 21.

Rev. 21:7

l) Types of temptations and sins

- 1. Sins of tongue (will be discussed in chapter 3)

- 2. Sin of anger (v.20)

The Lord is long-suffering and very slow in His wrath , and He likes His children to be like Him. If we commit any sin we can return back immediately and pray to our Lord asking forgiveness, but in the time of wrath we are unable to stand before the Lord and talk to Him.

Eccl. 7:9

Prov. 15:18

Prov. 22:24-25

Tit. 1:7

- 3. Filthiness and wickedness (V. 21)

These are traces of the old person who was overcome by the new person in baptism. These traces need to be uncovered and treated by the ‘word of God’ , which has the power to cure us. Remember that these sins can disqualify us from heaven.

Eph.5:4-5

Mark 7:21

- 4. Deceiving one’s self (V.22)

We are not justified because we listen to the word of God , but surely when we do according to the word of God. Listening only will lead to judgement. Think about these verses:

Rom 12:13

Mat. 7:26

5. Forgetting the word of God

The word of God in our hearts needs care and nutrition to give fruits(Refer to the parable of the Sower- Mat. 13)