**The Epistle of James: Some Concluding Thoughts**

**Scripture: Several chapters and verses.**

 Good morning! Today we are going to spend our time together sharing some concluding thoughts regarding the Epistle of James. We have been discussing this book of the Bible since Katie and I joined you last November. This has been quite a journey as we have discussed several topics regarding the ways in which a Christian needs to behave, especially while in the presence of non-believers. This has been exciting because this is the first book of study that we have been able to complete together. Before we begin our discussion today let us first review the main idea in the Epistle of James: Followers of Christ must not only have a personal relationship with Him, but for that faith to be real it must be evidenced in the way they live their lives. In today’s message we will review five major points of application that we can take with us from the Epistle of James as we move forward in our walk with Christ together.

**Application #1: A follower of Christ will face trials in life with the attitude of joy.**

**Application #2: A follower of Christ will love others without an attitude of partiality.**

**Application #3: A follower of Christ will show love for God by using their tongue to honor God, not bring Him dishonor.**

**Application #4: A follower of Christ will love others with humility keeping in mind that his goal is to please God, not man.**

**Application #5: A follower of Christ will show love for others by helping them to endure trials, praying for them when they suffer, always speaking honestly with them and bringing them back to the truth if they stray.**

*Application #1: A follower of Christ will face trials in life with the attitude of joy.*

 As we began our study of this Epistle, one of the first topics we discussed was the attitude that James instructs his readers to have regarding trials. We concluded that followers of Christ need to face the challenges and suffering in this life as an opportunity to bring glory to God. We are instructed to look upon trials in this manner because is through the experiences we have in our lives that we are molded into the people that God wants us to be.

 Let us encourage each other with the words of Scripture that teach us the value of trials and the way they help to mold us into God’s people. In the Od Testament we have several examples of God’s people facing challenges in their lives and how the Lord used those challenges to strengthen His people for tough times they would be facing later in their lives. One such example is in the book of Exodus when the nation of Israel was in the wilderness heading towards the Promised Land. To test the faith of the people and to meet their need for food God sent the people manna every day early in the morning for them. However, the people had to follow God’s instructions if they were to have the food they needed. In Exodus 16:4 we read **“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, so that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction.’”** God provided help for His people, but in doing so He was also testing their faith to see if they would follow His instructions. This testing of faith showed that God loves His people so much that He was willing to give them a challenge so that they would be ready to face the difficulties they would later face as they entered the Promised Land.

 One other example of the reason why trials are to be looked upon with joy is because God uses those challenges to make us focus on Him more than on what is happening in this world. Jesus tested the disciple Philip before He fed the 5,000 people in John chapter 6. Philip knew that the people who came to hear Jesus were hungry, but rather than trust God to provide Philip only considered the worldly way for the issue to be resolved. When a trial comes into our lives, we can face it with joy because we know that it is through testing that God is making us become more dependent on Him and His provision. So, as we have learned in the Epistle of James, a follower of Christ needs to face trials in confidence with joy knowing that God is more powerful than any challenge we might face and that through those trials we can grow in faith.

*Application #2: A follower of Christ will love others without an attitude of partiality.*

 The second application for us to review today is the teaching in the Epistle of James that loving others is one of the most powerful ways we can honor God, but we must love others without the attitude of partiality. When we were discussing this topic, we talked about the situation James gave us of how the rich or people who are deemed to be important in the culture are pandered to in so many ways. They are given special seating at banquets, or they are almost worshiped as being some sort of special person just because of their wealth or celebrity status. James instructed us in his writing that having such an attitude is not appropriate, nor will that do us any good in our lives. I am an avid football fan, and I really enjoy the sport, so I am getting excited because this is the time of year when all the football games are starting. Being an admirer of the sport is one thing, but I must constantly remind myself that these are only athletes, and they are people just like you and me. There is no reason to worship or hold them in a special position. The reason this is the case is because it is not celebrities or the rich who have provided for us salvation or have restored the broken relationship we have with God. Jesus Christ, who lived as a poor man even though He was so rich in Spirit, is the One who deserves all our worship and praise. We can admire others for their talents and enjoy the entertainment they provide without dishonoring God, but if we become worshipers of man and show partiality to those who can entertain or possibly give us something then we are sinning against the God who made us. Rather than have that attitude, let us love all people equally as being those who are created in the image of God and deserve our respect because they are His creation.

*Application #3: A follower of Christ will show love for God by using their tongue to honor God, not bring Him dishonor.*

In chapter 3 of the epistle James instructed his readers to carefully use their tongues when living out their faith in Christ. The conclusion James made regarding the tongue is that it is the hardest part of the body to control and without the guidance of the Holy Spirit that is impossible to do. In chapter 3 verse 1 James warns his readers that not many of them should desire to become teachers because every word that they utter to their listeners will be held accountable by God on the day of judgment. When we were discussing this a few months ago we said that this applies not only to teachers of the Bible, such as Pastors, but it also applies to anyone who takes a position of authority over another in the church. Every word that is spoken in teaching is important because when someone is new to the faith, for example, they are still infants in that faith and therefore are very impressionable. Anyone who wants to work as a teacher of the faith must take that responsibility seriously knowing that those who listen will have their eternal salvation impacted by what they are taught.

 Another aspect of the tongue that we must review is that we need to be careful in our conversations with others not to speak in a way that will cause them to have a false understanding of God or the gospel. In verse 17 of chapter 3 James provides a list of the characteristics of loving speech that we can use with our tongues to share with others. **“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, free of hypocrisy.”** When we use our tongues in the service to God we need to speak the truth, speak peacefully s that we help to establish a peaceful relationship with them, be gentle when we speak so that we are not causing there to be division, we also need to be reasonable meaning that we are not quick to cause arguments, show mercy in our speech which means that we are not quick to condemn others remembering that we also have sins that we struggle with as well, speak impartially not taking sides and trying to understand what all people are saying and finally we need to speak without hypocrisy meaning that we must show humility rather than make outrageous claims that are not true. Therefore, when a follower of Christ uses the tongue is such a selfless and loving manner, they bring God the honor He so rightly deserves.

*Application #4: A follower of Christ will love others with humility keeping in mind that his goal is to please God, not man.*

 In chapter 4 of the epistle, we discussed what the source of fighting is in the church today. We concluded that the source of fights is the desire to gain for ourselves and not seeking what is best for the kingdom of God. The first way that our desires can result in fighting is when we desire to be a friend of the world rather than a friend of God. In verse 4 of chapter 4 James writes **“You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”** When we want to be a fried of the world and have the world respect us by becoming like it, we make ourselves enemies of God. A follower of Christ is called to live in this fallen world, but not to become like it. We need to share the good news of Christ and make disciples for the kingdom. We can do this by using the talents that the Lord has entrusted to us.

 Another important aspect to living in humility with others is not judging others and holding them to a standard that we ourselves are not willing to follow. Such hypocritical behavior causes anger and division among the body of Christ. In verses 11-12 James writes **“Do not speak against one another, brothers and sisters. The one who speaks against a brother or sister, or judges his brother or sister, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you, judging your neighbor?”** We cannot make ourselves to be like God because He is holy and is the only One able to make righteous judgments. We need to keep a humble heart and when we interact with others treat them as fellow image-bearers who need to have saving relationship with Jesus Christ. All of us need this, so we should not hold others to a standard that we are not also held to.

*Application #5: A follower of Christ will show love for others by helping them to endure trials, praying for them when they suffer, always speaking honestly with them and bringing them back to the truth if they stray.*

 The final application we will take from the Epistle of James is that followers of Christ need not only live their faith for others to witness, but they also need to hep others when they suffer and bring them back to the church if they suffer. We were talking about the importance of standing up for the truth in a world that has such a warped view of it. We must recognize that truth is not what each individual person likes to think it is. Truth is universal meaning that it applies to all times, places and people. Whether someone likes it or not there is only one reality that all of us live in. When someone becomes a victim of their own misguided wisdom and think that they can live according to their own truth we need to be willing to guide them back to the only truth that exists, which is the truth made known through Jesus Christ. Anything else in this world that attempts to distract those in the faith from the One true God needs to be thwarted and replaced with the truth as found in Scripture.

 James made it clear that when someone is guided back to the truth there will be positive eternal consequences for that person. Also, a follower of Christ who does such things is living out their faith in an effective manner showing that they love others even more than they love themselves. This is the ultimate way in which to show how the life of a follower of Christ is different than the rest of the world.

*Conclusion*

 As we conclude this message today and close our discussion over the Epistle of James, I hope that each of you who have been with us over these several months have found this epistle to be encouraging to you in your walk with Christ. Living in this world and experiencing the beauty of God’s creation is a privilege, but we also must live in a fallen world where we must deal with a fallen nature and struggle with sin. Even though the challenges seem to be countless and the call to holiness may seem impossible, we can take courage in the words of Christ who told His disciples that He would be with them until the end of the age. Ladies and Gentlemen, our Lord is with us and will help us when we seek His will. Let us do our very best to honor our Lord in the way we live so that when we stand before His presence, we ca hear Him utter these words of approval: **”Well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:23).**

 If anyone has any questions, comments or insights you would like to share at this time please feel free to share before we conclude. Prayer.