



The Truth about Loving the Outcast (God loves you and has a difficult plan for your life!)

James 1:1-12

Where did we get the idea that life has to be perfect? (vv. 1-4)

Every week worshipers enter the Windsor Road assembly with questions and challenges about life. We gather on Sunday, having lived Monday through Saturday with tests and trials. And we wonder, "Why?" We came to Christ. We started attending church. We're seeking God. We want to know more about His Word. But then we still struggle. Why? Why has my job been eliminated? Why is my health bad? Why cancer? Why a heart attack? Why can't my child be cured? Why are people attacking me, my faith, what I believe?

And the question is not only, "Why has this happened?" But "What did I do that God would let this happen? Is He angry with me? Have I frustrated Him? How could *He* let this happen?"

These are not new questions. James, the brother of Jesus (Galatians 1:6) and the pastor of a scattered congregation (Acts 15), addressed Christians of a predominately Hebrew ethnicity, who were dislocated because of persecution (Acts 8:1). His letter is a message of hope about what God expects of His people—even in the harshest circumstances. God wants His people—no matter where they are—to live with single-minded focus; to be fully devoted followers of Christ. God's vision for His church—this church—is that through undeserved suffering we become "mature and complete, not lacking anything."

Do we know what we *don't know*? (vv. 5-8)

That's why v. 5 says that if we lack wisdom, we should ask God who gives generously! He never belittles us when we come asking for wisdom. Wisdom is not merely information. Wisdom is a spiritual quality. It's more than intellect. It is grounded in the fear and respect of the Lord. It is a spiritual ability; a spiritual skill. Wisdom allows me apply what knowledge I have.

If I'm in a situation that I've never faced before, I need to go to God and humbly ask for His help; confident that He will give what I need to help me persevere. One author wrote that "the best question ever is this—in light of my current situation, what is the wise thing to do? Wise people know what they don't know; and they are not afraid to go to those who do know!" (Stanley 2004, 148)

The assumption is that there are times when we won't know what to do; God's promise is that He will supply our need for wisdom—always through the Bible (Proverbs); and sometimes through a conversation with a mature believer and/or the Holy Spirit's prompting in our prayer time.

The stipulation is that we believe and not doubt. This means that God wants us to ***act*** on His wisdom, not merely ***think it over***. He's the Creator and King, not a consultant! If we approach God with an attitude that says, "I'll think about what you have to say and then let you know my decision," James says we've become a hearer of the Word instead of a doer. Doubting is not about feelings of uncertainty; it's about failure to act. When this happens we become double-minded, like the ocean waves sloshing back and forth against the beach; and we won't receive anything from the Lord. What is it that God has already told you to do that you're not doing? When is that going to change?

Do we glory in God or stuff? (vv. 9-12)

In v. 9, "take pride" also means "to glory"; the idea is that in hardship, there's the temptation to focus our security on tangible, physical assets like money or possessions. These Hebrew Christians were paying a dear price for their faith economically.

Both poverty and riches bring enormous pressure on a person to focus on the world rather than on Christ. James reminds us that wealth is so temporary—like the flowers in Israel which appeared one day and were scorched by the desert heat the next—wealth is temporary and brings no advantage before God. The church is to be counter-cultural, reversing the values of the world. (ESV Study Bible, p.. 2391)

What would our community look like if the Windsor Road community—1000 of us—walked out of these doors, fully confident that whatever happened to us God was using to forge in us a maturity that would make us a complete family of believers. This is God's vision--that we receive trials as His gifts to test the quality of our faith so that having persevered with wisdom; we would be toughened, tempered, and prepared for eternal life with God.

I have never heard anyone say, "The deepest and rarest and most satisfying joys of my life have come in times of extended ease and earthly comfort." Nobody says that. It isn't true. What's true is what Samuel Rutherford said when he was put in the cellars of affliction: "The Great King keeps his wine there"—not in the courtyard where the sun shines. (John Piper)