

# *THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## JAMES LESSON 1 (Chapter 1)

### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.* Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Kevin Pendergrass.

Welcome to the Gospel of Christ. In this lesson we are going to be dealing with how to handle trials and tribulations. This is our first lesson in a study of the Book of James, which is a very practical book. In fact, it is one of the most practical books in the New Testament. When we go to the Book of James, there are many different lessons that we can learn to help us better our lives. In this lesson, we will be looking at what the Bible has to say about how to handle trials and tribulations.

There are many different thoughts on how to handle trials and tribulations. Unfortunately, people today, instead of going to the Bible, go to just about anything **but** the Bible. They will go to some sort of self-help books. They will go to some sort of worldly wisdom to try to help them through their trials and tribulations. They will go to drugs or alcohol, and will turn to sinful things—things of the world such as drugs that alter their minds or things that the world tells them will work. But if we really want to do what the Bible has to say, and if we really want to get through our trials and tribulations, we must go to the Bible. In James 1:2 James said, “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials.” If you were to tell that to someone who never had read the Bible, they probably would think that you were crazy to make such a statement. “Count it all joy” when we have bad things happen to us?! How can we “count it all joy” when terrible things happen to us? It is not that we have to have a big smile on our faces when terrible things happen to us. Rather, it is that we are able to find joy in times of trouble. That is what James is saying when he writes, “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials.” This lesson is designed to help us deal with trials when they do come our way.

The first point that we need to understand is that God will never give us more than what we can handle. You may have heard someone say when something happens, “I just can’t handle this,” or “This is too much; I can’t deal with this. God has given me too much.” We sometimes have an attitude of “Why me?!” The Bible promises us, in regard to trials and tribulations, that we will not be asked to endure more than what we can handle. If we are going through it, then we **will** be able to bear it. Look at what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:13 about things that come our way.

“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

Isn’t it interesting, the way that Paul put this? He said, “No temptation has overtaken you **except such as is common to man.**” We sometimes have the mentality that bad things happen **only to us.** But when we look out into the world, we see that worse things happen to other people. The same things that we endure, others endure, too. When we can read in the Bible that God has promised never to give us more than we can handle, that helps us to handle our problems scripturally. We can know that if we are going through something, we **will** be able to handle it.

Paul goes on to talk about “the way of escape” that God provides for us when we are going through trials. Many people claim that their way of escape is through the use of alcohol, or by doing this or that. But what is Paul really saying is “the way of escape”? What did Paul have in mind when he said that there is a way of escape? Let’s see what the Bible has to say. In the Book of Philippians 4:6-7 we read,

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

When it comes to trials and tribulations, we need to be people of prayer. We must pray and go to the Word of God. In verse 7 Paul spoke of how “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” When trials come your way, do you pray? It is easy, when things happen to us, for us to blame God. When bad trials come, some people say, “The reason I’m no longer a Christian,” or “The reason I do not go to church any more,” is because something happened, and if God really loved them, He wouldn’t have allowed that to happen. That is not true. That is not what the Bible teaches. We need to be people of prayer. We need to hit our knees and pray to thank God for all the blessings He has given us. We need to pray for comfort so that God will comfort us. We do not need to be people who run away when trials come along. We must not say, “God really must not love me if this happened. Why did this evil happen to me?” The Bible doesn’t say, “Run away from it.” We need to be people of prayer. If we are, then the Bible says that God will “guard our hearts and our minds through Christ Jesus.” How is this done? How does God guard our hearts and minds through Jesus? He does it through the Word of God. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul said that it is the written Word that works through us. Maybe you’ve had a really tough day. Maybe you did things that day for Christ, and because of that, someone made fun of you. Or perhaps something else bad happened to you. Maybe you lost your job for doing the right thing. But you can know that you can come to the Word of God, read what the Bible has to say, and receive comfort. You can receive peace through the Word of God. In Romans 15:4 we read, “Whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we, through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope.” The Word of God gives us great comfort. Earlier I was talking about how we think we are the only ones who have ever gone through problems. If we think we are having a bad day, we can receive comfort by picking up the Bible and reading it. We can read about Jesus’ life, Paul’s life, or the lives of the prophets, and see what they had to go through. When we realize everything they went through, then we might realize that what **we** are going through is not so bad after all. The Scriptures can give us great comfort. In Acts 17:11 we know that the Bereans were more noble minded than the Christians in Thessalonica. Why? It was because they “searched the Scriptures daily.” One of the problems today is Bible ignorance. People no longer go to the Bible for answers. People no longer go to the Word of God for comfort. Because of that, we have people who are miserable. They are not letting the Word of God guard their thoughts and minds like the Bible should. We need to be people who go to the Bible to study in order to gain the comfort of the Scriptures. Where does faith come from? A person might say, “I wish I had a stronger faith.” Romans 10:17 says that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Only through the written Word (the Scriptures) can we gain a true faith and have our hearts comforted.

What is another way that God comforts and guards our hearts and minds? It is through our Christian brethren. If a person has been baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3-4) for the forgiveness of sins, then that person is a part of the body of Christ. The text of 1 Corinthians 12 talks in detail about how, as brothers and sisters in Christ, we are to have great care and love for one another, and we are to be there for one another. When one

of us hurts, we all hurt. One way that God guards us is through our Christian brethren. In 2 Corinthians 7:13ff. Paul talked about this when he wrote, “Therefore we have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all.” Notice that Paul’s spirit had been refreshed by his fellow Christians. He then said,

“For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I am not ashamed. But as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting to Titus was found true. And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him. Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything.”

Why was Paul able to derive such comfort? It was because of his Christian brethren who were able to refresh one another, comfort one another, talk to one another, encourage one another, and help one another. In Philemon 1:7 Paul wrote, “We have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.” How are the hearts of the saints guarded and refreshed? It was not through worldly passions or drugs. It was by other Christian brethren. In Philemon 1:20 Paul wrote “Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.” In Romans 15:32 Paul said that he hoped “that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.” It is a wonderful thing to be able to pick up the phone, call a brother or sister in Christ, and talk to him or her. There have been times when you may have been gone through something terrible, and you weren’t strong enough at the time, but someone—because they cared about you and loved you—called you and just listened to you talk. They encouraged you by listening to you, so that when you hung up the phone you could honestly say that your heart was refreshed by that brother or sister in Christ. That is true for me, too. When I’m going through a tough day because I’m being persecuted, and I get a phone call from a brother in Christ who talks to me and encourages me, I thank God, when I hang up the phone, that my heart has been refreshed. That is what we need to get back to doing. As brothers and sisters in Christ, if we are faithful members of the church of Christ, then we can encourage, edify, and refresh one another. It is kind of like a person who walks up to you and asks, “How are you doing today?” You say, “I’m doing **terrible!**” The person then says, “Well, that’s great. I’m glad to hear that.” The reason the person replied like that is because he wasn’t listening to you. When we ask people how they are doing, we need to mean it. If someone says, “I’m not doing well,” we should not walk away. Rather, we need to listen to that person so that we can talk to him, refresh him, and encourage him. He obviously is going through some trials and tribulations, and he needs our help. We need to be there to help him.

Another way that God guards our hearts and minds in times of tribulation is through providence. Habakkuk is a great book about God’s providence. He is talking to God, and he says that the things that are occurring are not fair. God, however, reassures Habakkuk that He is still in control. In Habakkuk 2:20 God says that He is in His holy temple, and that He is in control. It may not seem, in the world, like things are going great. But God **is** in control. We should not worry. In Genesis 50:20 we find Joseph talking to his brothers, who had treated him badly. If go back several chapters, we find that Joseph’s brothers had thrown him into a pit, which was not very nice. Then they sold him into slavery. Then he was thrown in jail. But finally he was made second in command in Egypt. In Genesis 50:20 he said to his brothers, “You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.” God is in control. Let us never forget that. If we are living faithfully, God is in control. God will not give us more than we can bear. All things work together for good to those who love the Lord (Rom. 8:28).

The next point I want us to consider is that humans are designed to go through trials. Death is a part of life. It is something that happens. Whether we are inside or outside of our houses, we still are going to go through trials. Humans are designed to go through trials. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 tells us that there is a time for everything. There is a time to weep, a time to be happy, and a time for everything else. There will be times in our lives that are sad. But we are designed so that we are supposed to go through those trials. If we do, we will be better people because of it. In James 1 James talked about what trials are all about, the purpose of trials, and how trials will make us better people. James said, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (vss. 2-3). What does the testing or trying of our faith produce? It produces patience. Why is it that many people today have no patience? It is because they have not allowed themselves to learn from their trials. They keep repeating the same mistakes, and they do not learn from their trials and tribulations. So, when the next trial comes their way, they will not be able to face it because they have not learned patience through their trials. James 1:4-5 says,

"But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind."

Perhaps you have said a prayer when things were going bad, so you prayed to God to ask Him to help you. But you had the mindset of, "Well, I know that nothing good is going to come of this anyway. I've already tried praying. I've prayed a lot, and nothing has happened." That is praying with doubt. You really do not even mean what you are saying. James says that if we pray like that, then "let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." James tells us that if we ask God for something, but we really do not have true faith and are not asking in full confidence, then we should not expect to receive anything because we do not think that we will receive anything in the first place. James is saying that trials will help us in our lives, but we have to be willing to go through those trials in order to gain patience. At the same time, however, we can refuse to gain patience. We can refuse to be mature. It amazes me when I see people who are in their seventies or eighties, and they tell me all the things that happened to them in the past. They tell me about the deaths of friends or family members, or the times that they lost jobs, and so on. Yet they are some of the happiest people I've ever met. Why? It is because every time something bad happened to them, they learned from the experience and were able to gain more patience as a result. We need to learn from James 1:2-8 that we are designed to go through trials, and that we **will** go through trials. In fact, the more we live a godly life, the more we probably will be tried and tested. But let us count that as a good thing. Let us count it all joy when we fall into such trials because they will make us better people if we allow them to do so. If we never go through trials, then patience cannot "have its perfect work" in our lives. Think of the example of Job, who was a god-fearing man. He was wealthy. He had many children and a good wife. Everything was going well for him. But Satan had a discussion with God and said, "No wonder Job is so happy. Nothing bad has ever happened to him before. He has no reason **not** to love You!" God (while remaining in control) allowed Satan to test Job, and in the process Job ended up losing all his wealth, all his children, and even his health. Then, when he went to his wife for some encouragement, she said, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9). If Job was looking for encouragement from his wife, he certainly did not get it! After everything that happened to him, Job still was remaining true to God. Then his wife said, "Curse God and die! Do not be faithful any more because if God truly loved you, He wouldn't let these things happen to you."

That was not true—and Job knew it! Look, then, at Job’s response in Job 2:10—“You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” Then the Bible says, “In all this Job did not sin with his lips.” Notice the mentality that Job had. He said, “We want to accept good from God, and all the great blessings from God. But when something bad comes our way, should we not also be willing to accept it, too?” Sometimes, when it comes to Christianity, people are “fair-weather Christians.” They are there when things are going great. And as long as they have a good job and a lot of friends, and everything is going well, they are ready to praise God. They are ready to thank God for all the things He has done. But then when something goes wrong, they become like Job’s wife. Their attitude is, “Curse God and die!” But it was not **God** who did something bad to them. It was **Satan**. God may have allowed it to happen, but it strengthened Job in the end, and he became a better person for it. We need to remember the example of Job so that we can persevere in times of trials and tribulations.

Look, too, at the example of Paul in 2 Corinthians 9:24-28. Paul was a man who understood what it was like to go through trials. I want to say here that we have not even come close to having to endure the same types of trials that Paul went through. If we want to talk about how bad we have it today, we must remember that we do not even come close to having it as bad as Paul had it in his day. He had been whipped, beaten, and stoned. He had lost sleep. He was hungry at times because he had gone without food. He was cold. He was shipwrecked. And the list goes on and on. But did Paul ever leave Christianity? Did he say, “Oh me. This is just too much. If God really loved me, He wouldn’t be allowing me to go through these things”? No. Paul was thankful for those things because they made him a stronger Christian and a stronger person. When we compare our trials to those of the early Christians, in reality we have it easy. It is interesting to note what Paul called such trials. He was stoned, shipwrecked, and beaten with rods. He had been put in prison. He had gone without food. He had gone without water. And he even talked about how some of his own brethren were against him at times. Today we might find that is true of us, too. But after listing all of these things that Paul said he had to go through, did he complain? He sure didn’t. In 2 Corinthians 4:17 we read, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” I love how Paul said, “our **light** affliction.” Paul viewed his trials as small. But small as compared to what? **Small as compared to eternity!** We may be going through things in this life that we do not like or understand. They may be terrible, and they may be bad. But they are a “light affliction” because we are designed to go through such trials—which will only make us stronger. Plus, it really does not matter because if we remain faithful, in the end we will have Heaven as our eternal home. And **anything**, compared to that, would be just “a light affliction.”

The third and final point I want us to consider is this: God is the God of all comfort. As faithful Christians we have God—the God of all comfort—to comfort us. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 Paul talked about how it is God Who comforts us during terrible times. In his discussion, Paul used the word “comfort” several times. God is the One Who comforts us. We do not get comfort from the world. It is sad that people want to turn to everybody **but** God. People want to turn to everyone except the One Who made them. God is the Creator, we know from Genesis 1 and 2, of everything. He knows how we work. He knows how we are to be comforted because He is “the God of all comfort.” But we must **let** Him comfort us and do His job. Compared to eternity in Heaven, nothing should take away our joy or the comfort that we have in Christ. In Galatians 5:22 we are told that one of the fruits of the Spirit is joy. As Christians, we need to be happy people. If we are faithful members of the Lord’s church, we need to be happy and joyful. If we are more miserable than people in the world, how does that make the Lord’s church look? How does that make Christian-

ity look? It certainly doesn't make it look good because people may say, "I can be happier just living in the world than that Christian can—and he claims that he has 'the God of all comfort.' But I'm happier than that person." That does not look good. We need to remember that we are to have joy in our Christian lives, and that God can give it to us even in times of trial. Where are all spiritual blessings found? Ephesians 1:3 tells us that all spiritual blessings are found only "in Christ." Christians can have all those spiritual blessings. We should be joyful people, even in times of trial. In Matthew 6:33 Christ said that He would give us all the things we need **if** we seek Him first. That does not mean that we will necessarily receive all the things we **want**. But we will receive from God all the things that we **need**. Notice what James says in James 1:12—"Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." Blessed is the man who endures trials and temptations. This is the way that we need to deal with trials and tribulations when they come to us.

Maybe a problem for you today is that you are not yet a Christian. You are not seeking comfort from the right source—which is why you haven't been able to deal with problems. The good news is that you can change today. Today is the day of salvation. Have you heard what the Bible has to say (Rom. 10:17)? Have you believed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Jn. 3:16)? Are you willing to repent of all your sins (Lk. 17:30)? Are you willing to confess that Jesus is Lord (Rom. 10:10)? But even if you do all those things, you still are not saved. You still do not have the God of all comfort in your life because you have not yet been baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). If you have not yet obeyed the truth, we pray today that you will obey the Gospel of Christ.

**Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

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## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR JAMES LESSON 1 (CHAPTER 1)

1. The essence of James 1 is summed up in verse 2 of the chapter. What does it say?
2. There are two main messages found in 1 Corinthians 10:13. What is the first one?
3. There are two main messages found in 1 Corinthians 10:13. What is the second one?
4. What does Philippians 4:6 admonish us to do?
5. What does Philippians 4:7 tell us will happen if we ask God for His help?
6. According to Romans 15:4, what is one important source of comfort for Christians during times of trial and tribulation?
7. According to Paul's statements in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, what "works in us" to help us when we believe in God, His Word, and His Son?
8. Acts 17:11 compares the Christians in Berea with those in Thessalonica. What had the Christians in Berea done that made them "more fair-minded" than those Christians in Thessalonica?
9. A large part of each Christian's strength comes from his or her faith. According to Romans 10:17, what is the source of that faith?
10. According to 2 Corinthians 7:13, what was it that refreshed Titus' spirit?
11. According to Philemon 1:7, what act had Philemon carried out that merited an apostolic commendation?
12. In Philemon 1:20, what did Paul urge Philemon to do on his (Paul's) behalf?
13. In Romans 15:32, what two personal desires (or "hopes") did Paul express to the Christians living in Rome?
14. In Habakkuk 2:20, what did God say to the prophet to reassure him?
15. In Genesis 50:20, what did Joseph say to his brothers regarding the things they had done to him in the past?
16. What important message is found in Romans 8:28 for all Christians?
17. According to James 2:3, what does the testing of a Christian's faith produce?
18. According to James 1:4-5, whenever a Christian prays to God, how should he or she **not** pray?
19. In Job 2:10, what important question did Job ask his wife?