

Remaining Steadfast In Faith

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Date: 30 August 2026

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[0:00] If you've got your Bibles and you want to follow, if you turn back to the book of James and chapter 1, hopefully over the next number of Sunday mornings, or when I'm here on a Sunday morning, we'll look through the book of James together and see what James has to teach us.

And I would encourage you, if you haven't read the book of James before, to please read it. There's only five chapters. The longest chapter is chapter 1. There's 27 verses in it, and it should, I'm a slow reader, take you only about 15 to 16 minutes to read the five chapters.

And I would encourage you to do so over the next weeks as we seek to be able to study the book together. Our text this morning, if you're looking for a text, it is from James chapter 1 and verse 4, Once you start reading James, you'll find that James can be quite challenging in what he says to us. But bear in mind what it says there in verse 4. James is looking for us to be steadfast in our faith, that we may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

And I think it's helpful for us as we focus on the book of James, and we'll probably come back to that verse time and again to remind us what it is that James is seeking to teach us.

[1:44] So, you're looking for a title this morning, it's Remaining Steadfast in Faith. And while there's two points there, you'll see in the first point there are two questions.

So, there are probably really three points. But we'll take the first point as it is, who is James and who does he write to? And we'll look at a faith that is steadfast and bears fruit.

So, the first question, who is James and who does he write to? Well, if you go through the New Testament, there are five Jameses that are mentioned.

There's James, the brother of John, the son of Zebedee. But we read that James was executed by Herod Agrippa. And you can read that in Acts 12 and at verse 2.

And then there's James, the son of Alphaeus, mentioned in Matthew 10, verse 3. James, the son of Mary, mentioned in Matthew 27, at verse 56.

[2:48] And then there's James, the father of the apostle named Judas, not Judas Iscariot, but the other Judas, and he's mentioned twice in the book of Luke and then in the book of Acts.

Of these four men, the only one that could have had the credibility, James, the brother of John. To us, in the way that this book is written, is James, the brother of John.

But the dating that's been put on the book of James excludes him because of his execution by Herod Agrippa, which takes us to the one final James that's mentioned in the New Testament.

And that is James, the half-brother of Jesus. James, the half-brother of Jesus, who's mentioned in Matthew 13 and at verse 55.

Is not this the carpenter's son? When Jesus was addressing the crowd and they were questioning who he was, is not this the carpenter's son?

[3:56] Is not this the mother? Is mother not called Mary? Are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas here with us?

And then, as we see that list before us, many of the commentators would say that James was actually the oldest of Jesus' younger brothers.

And as we see in John 7, at verse 5, when Jesus was teaching, James and the rest of his brothers were not believers.

They'd heard what Jesus had to say. They'd been brought up in the home with him. But initially, what we find out, as we hear in John 7, at verse 5, they were not believers. We can then go on, and we can find out that there's a period of time has passed.

We don't hear about James' conversion, but what we find out is that James is attending the place of prayer. James, as we see in Acts 1, 14, all these with one accord, devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

[5:16] The brothers of Jesus were there, attending the prayer meeting, waiting for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. So there was a period of time that had passed, and James has obviously come to faith.

We don't read about his conversion. But what we do find out is that James became a prominent member in the church, somebody that people looked up for, up to, somebody that people wanted to make sure that he was aware of everything that was happening.

We see the night that Peter was released, miraculously, from the prison cell, that when the doors was open, and he managed to get everybody to see that he was there, that he motions to them with his hand to be silent.

And he describes to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison cell. And what does he say? Tell these things to James and to the brothers.

And then he departed to another place. James was somebody that the people looked up to, even after his conversion, although we know nothing about it.

[6:31] And then, the next time we read about James, is that the Jerusalem Council, there'd been a fallout over circumcision, and the Jerusalem Council was called, and there was a debate back and forth.

And then we see James at Acts 15, 13, standing up after they had finished speaking. James replied, Brothers, listen to me. James had authority within the church to be able to speak.

And we see that Paul, after he was converted, went to visit with him, and spend time with him. We have Paul's account of Jesus' resurrection, and how Jesus actually appeared to James, and then to all the apostles.

And again, Paul speaks of James as the Lord's brother. So we can identify who James is by picking up the evidence that's available to us as we go through the New Testament.

And commentators agree that this is the James that wrote the book that is here before us. Why do I go into that kind of detail?

[7:45] Well, when we read the first verse, all we have is James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. We've got no other information other than James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We don't have any introduction telling us who he was. He could, just as easily, have started off this book by saying, James, the half-brother of Jesus, born by Mary, and actually claimed a title.

But he didn't. He comes here, there's no boasting from James. And what we learn right at the beginning of this chapter, of this book, that while James could have claimed the title of the brother of Jesus, the son of Mary, he comes and he humbles himself and he takes a servant title.

Right at the beginning, James teaches us that it's not about boasting about ourselves, it's great to get titles, it's great to be well known, but James right away tells us here that he's a servant, first and foremost, of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we come and as we gather this morning, do we know what it is to come as a servant? We sang, I will not boast in anything, no gifts, no power, no wisdom, no, I will boast in Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection.

[9:32] Is that our boast this morning? Not in what we've done, what we've achieved, but we come and we recognise that no matter what we've achieved in life, we are a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And James teaches us that right at the beginning of his book to us. And the second question that we had as we think about this is, who does James write to?

Who is it that James is writing to as he breaks down God's word in these five chapters? Well, we have in the second part of verse one it says there, to the twelve tribes, to the twelve tribes in the dispersion.

James is writing predominantly to a Jewish Christian church that have obviously been dispersed right across the nations.

He's addressing them because they need to be taught according to God's word. And those that received this letter would have known who James was and why he was writing to them.

[10:45] Many commentators will focus on the fact that this was predominantly to Jewish Christians that James was writing.

One commentator, Derek Prime, who was a Scottish evangelical minister, he was in Edinburgh at one time, he died in March 2020 and he wrote a commentary on James and he says this, this is

only the opinion of some and it seems to make much better sense to think that James' letter having been written both to Jews and Gentiles.

Nowhere does James provide any other possible clues that he may solely have been writing to Jewish Christians at that time. It is the New Testament principle that in Christ there is no Greek or Jew circumcised or uncircumcised as Paul wrote in Colossians 3.11 and Prime goes on to say it was James himself who referred to the Jerusalem council who took important initiatives to maintain the unity of God's people and he finalises it by saying what we've put up there on the screen furthermore there is no instruction in James' letter which is a particular Jewish reference rather its instruction is relevant to all Christians then as now so as we come and as we read God's word this morning let's not dismiss the fact that because it says it's to the 12 tribes in the dispersion but it doesn't apply to us here in Carloway this morning

God's word has been given to us we can read in the shorter catechism that the word of God which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament is the only rule to direct us on how we may glorify God that's everything that's contained within the scriptures of the Old and New Testament and we know and we've quoted before how Paul writes to Timothy 2 Timothy 3 and 16 all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching for reproof for correction and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete equipped for every good work does that tie in with what James said in James 1 verse 4 about being complete and lacking in nothing that the word of God every word that is contained within the scriptures is to be used for teaching and correction so as we identify that James is the brother of

Jesus as we identify that James writes a word not just primarily to Jewish Christians that he writes a word that's actually relevant for us here as we gather in Carloway this morning and that we recognize that we have a duty to learn and grow in our love and our knowledge and understanding of who God is why that we may be complete and lacking in nothing so as we meditate and as we think upon what James has to say to us this morning it is very much going to be a fly through the passage and you'll be thinking goodness me you've spent ten minutes in the first verse it is going to be a fly through the passage but I think it's helpful for us to be able to get the context in which James is writing and knowing who the writer is so we come to our second point a faith that is steadfast and bears fruit now say we know who the author is and we've established that this message is for us this morning if you were following in the

[14 : 53] ESV the title that's been given to the section that we have before us this morning is the testing of your faith which gives us an insight again into what James is pointing us towards as we go through this passage verse 2 count it all joy my brothers when you meet trials of various kinds but an opening line for James right away he pulls no punches for us just as the introduction to the book is short he gets straight down to business no flowery language no introduction further just straight down to business count it all joy my brothers when you meet trials of various kinds what's James teaching us here where does he get this teaching from well we can see in Matthew chapter 5 at verse 10 to 12 and this is something that we'll see repeating through the book of

James that James will refer to many texts from the sermon on the mount and from other things that he has heard Jesus his brother teaching the wording might be different it might be punchier it might be more direct but we'll see as we go through this that there is constant reference back primarily to the sermon on the mount and what Jesus sought to teach blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and other kinds of evil against you and utter all kinds of evil against you and falsely accuse you on my account rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you and we can go back and we can read the prophets we can see how the prophets were persecuted for their faith but we're taught here to count it all joy Jesus had taught blessed are those that are persecuted why for his name's sake because what's the reward that comes from that theirs is the kingdom of heaven and great is that reward for those that persevere this is about persevering in our faith when our faith is tested many that James would have written to there would have known what it was to suffer for their faith in him they had left the Jewish faith to nail their colours to Jesus and there would have been persecution for that and Jesus taught them that there was a reward awaiting them if they continued to persevere in their faith and he goes on in verse 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness it makes us stronger makes us stronger in our desire makes us stronger in our faith in Jesus and we see a similar message written to the

Hebrews in Hebrews 12 verses 1 to 3 therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or faint hearted or pointed to the example of Jesus who endured the persecution who endured to the cross and is now seated at the right hand of God the father interceding for us consider him consider Jesus each and every day consider what he endured for us that we may not grow weary and faint hearted what we suffer here is nothing compared to what Jesus suffered for us and may we look to him and focus on him and fix our eyes upon him that we may indeed know what it is to be steadfast steadfast in our faith can think back to when I was in school and as you can probably tell by looking at me

I'm not a cross country runner but we had to do cross country in school it wasn't really cross country because you just ran round a path but for somebody built like me it was hard work they were running the legs were getting sore thought the heart was going to come out the chest the lungs were burning and every time I ran past the PE teacher he would just say keep going Gordon keep going look at him he's way ahead of you keep going because I was always near the back but see the sense of accomplishment when you actually endured something like that because it made it easier the next time that you had to go out and run sometimes you were six week blocks and by the time six weeks came along you felt that you were running on air because you'd endured and you'd kept going and I'm not saying for one minute that the trials that we face in life are anything like running a cross country race not by any stretch but I hope you see that the principle is there that we have to endure we have to keep going and as we do keep going our trust and our faith in [21:08] Jesus gets stronger and we're able to endure and while my PE teacher stood at one spot he didn't run with us he just shouted at us keep going you can do it we have the benefit of knowing that Jesus is right beside us he has promised that he will never leave us that he will never forsake us and as we face trials as we face difficulties if we put our trust in him he has promised that he is with us and he will help us to remain steadfast Paul writes in Philippians 4 verses 12 and 13 I know how to be brought low and I know how to be abound in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger abundance and need I can do all things through him who strengthens me do you know the strengthening hand of Jesus as you face trials in life or are you trying to face them on your own not just the testing of your faith but the trials that come along do you truly know what it is to trust in Jesus knowing that you can draw strength from him each and every day and the verse that we looked at as our text and let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete lacking in nothing how often do we sing the Lord's my shepherd no lack shall I have do we know what it is to walk close with the good shepherd do we have him in our lives comforting us guiding us with his rod and with his staff and we see again in verse 12 the passage that we read what's the benefit in remaining steadfast as we go through trials

James gives us the encouragement for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him and that crown of life is the eternal life that awaits those that call upon Christ and endure and stick with him knowing what it is to lack nothing Paul reminds us and when the chief shepherd appears you will receive the unfading glory 1 Peter sorry Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 5 and 4 and Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 9 and 25 every athlete exercises self-control in all things they do it to receive a perishable wreath but we are imperishable the promise that is there for us a crown of glory that will never ever pass away if we come and we remain steadfast knowing what it is to be complete and perfect lacking in nothing James goes on and he teaches and I recognise that our time is gone and I think what I'll do is stop there and we'll come back to this at another time because I've got so much more that there is to say here but it might be an appropriate time to stop and take a break but we recognise that James writes to us he writes to us here in Carlyway this morning and he writes a message to us of the importance of being close to Jesus remaining steadfast seeking to know the good shepherd that we would indeed know what it is to be complete and lacking in nothing we go through many different trials many different testings there is absolutely no need for us to go through them on our own the good shepherd says come to me all ye that are weak and heavy laden and I will give you rest don't face these trials on your own if you don't know the hand of the good shepherd upon you come to him and he will direct you and he will lead you and you will know what it is to walk with him and be

steadfast in your faith let us pray