

Course Review & Overview

*Heavenly Father, as we come before You in our time together, we ask yet again that You would give us the ability to turn our thoughts and our hearts to a deeper appreciation of what You have done for us in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Lord, we are going to talk about suffering, among other things, and as we do, we will be reminded of the various things that come into our lives that are unpleasant or difficult. We are mindful of the words of Jesus, "In this world you will have tribulation." We know it is true because we do have tribulation. Thank You, Lord, for not simply telling us or warning us in advance, but for giving us Your Spirit and for giving us Your example of Christ, who suffered before us and showed us the way. We were called to this because You, O Lord, suffered for us, giving us an example that we might follow in Your steps even though You committed no sin and no deceit was found in Your mouth. When Your adversaries hurled their insults at You, You did not retaliate. When You suffered, You did not threaten back. Instead, You entrusted Yourself to the one who judges justly, Your Father. Lord, I pray that we ourselves would do the same when we suffer, even unjustly. I pray that we would not retaliate or threaten or complain, but entrust ourselves to You. Lord, even when we fail in that, we are also reminded that You bore our sins in Your body on the tree so that we might die to sin, even sins such as grumbling against our fellow man or against the providence that You send us, that we might live for righteousness. Lord, when we fail to do this, we are healed by Your stripes, by Your sacrifice. Lord, I pray that You would give us the privilege of living our lives in the light of Yours. Thank You for Your example and Your strength, O Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.*

We are going to spend the bulk of our time today looking at the book of I Peter. First, I would like to pause quickly to remind you where we are going and why. Specifically, on our first night, I pointed out that the New Testament has a multi-faceted or manifold witness to Christ. We tend to see the Gospel, the work of Christ, through Pauline eyes. Seeing the Gospel through Pauline eyes means that we look for things like justification by faith, substitutionary atonement, death and resurrection, the formula of the indicative and the imperative. The 'indicative' is what God has done for you in Christ and the 'imperative' is what you ought to do in response. That is a valid formula found throughout the Bible, but it is especially Pauline in nature. It is understandable that we would think first and last of Paul because he wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament. The sheer mass of Paul's works, the number of pages he wrote, is only rivaled by Acts and Luke together. The writings of Luke are close in length to those of Paul, but Luke's writings are not as systematic. They are historical. If you want a systematic summary of the Christian faith, you would probably turn first to the book of Romans, maybe second to Ephesians. If you wanted the essence of the Gospel itself you might turn to Galatians. So there are reasons why we turn first to Paul in order to structure our thought, when we go to structure what it means to be a Christian. It is not that we do not care about the Gospels, of course we do, but the Gospels are not as systematic as Paul. They are a narrative, a story. They are not a system of thought. The theme of this course is to attend to the rest of the New Testament, as the rest of it gives a varied and excellent testimony to the work of Christ, especially when it comes to proclaiming His work. We can say specifically that it is easiest to do that from the Gospels, because they simply tell the story of Christ. But Paul's writing is full of the death, the resurrection, and the atonement.

Hebrews is easy to use to proclaim the Gospel because there is so much in chapters 5 and 7-10 about Jesus' great high priestly ministry. In chapters 2 and 12, Jesus is our hero, the trailblazer of our faith. The hardest book to use is the book of James. James is hard because there is no description of the cross or the atonement of Christ. That gives us a test case that we can use in following the goal for our class, seeing how all the New Testament books outside of Paul proclaim who Jesus is.

Let us quickly review how the rest of the New Testament gives a unique testimony to the work of Christ. Hebrews says unique things beyond what Paul says, or things that Paul barely mentions. First, it says that Jesus is our champion, our trailblazer who defeats Satan, the central foe, and also the subsidiary foe, the fear of death. He clears the path so that we can run the race to the end of the course. Regarding suffering, he says to fix your eyes on Jesus, the author, champion and the perfecter of the faith. Jesus not only clears the path, but He enables us to run.

Secondly, Jesus is our great high priest, who offers the perfect and final sacrifice for sin. Today we are going to look at Peter and see his testimony. His testimony has things in common with Paul. He does have a notion of the atonement, which we will see in chapters 2 and 3. He says, "Jesus is our atoning sacrifice." But he also says something else. His testimony of Christ especially focuses on the incarnation of Christ and the assumption. He does not ever say it, but he assumes that Christ's life is a pattern for ours. The way He suffered, we should suffer. The way He endured, we should endure. Jesus is the perfect man, so the life of Christ will be our pattern.

I John also has a theology of the atonement. It says explicitly that Jesus is a sacrifice of atonement, rendered for our sins. It says that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sins. It has another way of testifying that is like James. John says that we can have assurance. I John's interest is that we should be assured that we belong to Jesus. He gives three tests, not the same three tests as James does, although they overlap a bit. The three tests are true doctrine, true love for the brothers, and true obedience to the laws of God. John writes to assure people that they do indeed belong to Jesus, the one who offered this sacrifice for their sins and dwells in them.

The book of Revelation also has a very rich testimony to Christ. Some people think that Revelation is mostly about the future. There is mention of the future, but I think the book of Revelation is mostly about Jesus. Revelation 19:10 says, "The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus." The book of Revelation is a prophecy and the essence of it is testimony to Christ. The first vision in the book is of Christ, in chapter 1. The last vision, in chapter 19, is a vision of Christ, or of the new Jerusalem. In chapter 20 and 21, it is a vision of the habitation that Christ has prepared for us, a testimony to Christ.

The book of Revelation has a very rich Christology. It has more titles for the Lord than any other book. He is the 'Son of man,' the 'living One,' the 'one who holds the keys of death and Hades.' He is 'the protector of the church,' 'the lion of the tribe of Judah,' the 'Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.' He is the 'lamb who was slain,' the 'Lord of Lords and King of Kings,' the 'rider on the white horse who wages war with His enemies.' He is 'the eternal God who gives eternal life,' the 'judge of Satan and his allies,' the 'root and offspring of David.' He is 'the bright, morning star,' the 'alpha and the omega' to name a few. The book of Revelation is full of descriptors of Jesus.

The book of James is arguably the hardest to look at. How does it testify to Jesus, even in all of its rich ethical teaching? Primarily, it is a book that testifies to a living faith in the lordship of Christ. It is not about the atonement; it is not about Jesus' death and resurrection. Those things are not mentioned, but he is deeply imbued with the idea that Jesus is James' Lord. Jesus is the teacher and the Lord of the church. James 1:1 says right away that he is a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even if he is Jesus' half brother, by physical descent from the same mother, he calls himself a servant, or slave, of Christ, who is his Lord. He says in Chapter 2:1, "We cannot hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ and still show favoritism," which we talked about a couple of weeks ago.

He says at the end of the book numerous times that the Lord will come and return and bring an end to history, that the Lord is able to heal those who are sick that cry out to Him and ask Him for healing. He says that the disciples have to follow the royal law, the law of the King, who is Jesus.

James is a meditation on the lordship of Christ. It has a specific form, namely, that the lordship of Christ especially has reference to His ethical teaching, the description of how a Christian ought to live. The majority of these verses are actually from the Sermon on the Mount. It is almost as though James meditated upon the Sermon on the Mount so much that although he never quoted it, when he went to describe the Christian life, it flowed out of him organically because it was his.

James 1:2 tells us that, "We should rejoice in trials." Rejoicing and suffering is mentioned almost immediately in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus says, "Blessed are you if you suffer persecution for My name's sake" (Matthew 5:11-12). James 1:4 says the goal of the righteous is that they come to maturity or perfection. Matthew 5:48 says we should be perfect, or mature, come to perfection. That is the goal of the teaching. James 1:5 says we should ask God to provide us with our needs and ask Him to give us our good gifts. James 1:17 says, similarly to Matthew 7:7-8, "Ask and it will be given to you. Seek it and you will find." James 1:22 says, "You must be doers of the Word and not hearers only," which is exactly what Matthew 7:21-27 says: "But there are those who call, Lord, Lord, but the wise man is the one who builds his house on the rock and hears His Words to obey them."

James 2:10 says, "It is obligatory for the disciple to keep the whole law. If you break one part, you are guilty of all." That is what Matthew 5:19 says, that Jesus did not come to abrogate the law, but to fulfill the whole law. James 2:14-26 says that if you profess faith, you have to act on it. Similarly, Matthew 7:21-23 says, "If you called Me Lord, you have to follow Me as Lord or else I will say, "Depart from Me, I never knew you.""

James 3:2 says not many of us should be teachers because we all stumble in many ways, and the more we talk, the more we err. Jesus also said in Matthew 12:36-37 that we will have to render account for every word we speak, whether good or evil. James 4:4 says, "You cannot be a friend of the world and a friend of God." Jesus says, "No man can serve two masters," in chapter 6:19-24 of Matthew.

Many times the theme is the same, and even the words are virtually identical between James and Matthew. James 2:8 says, "Love of one's neighbor is the center of the law" and Jesus says, "The love of neighbor is the second part of the second great commandment." James 4:6-10 says, "The one who exalts himself must be humbled." This is almost exactly what Jesus says, "Humble yourself before the Lord and I will lift you up." Jesus says that in Matthew 23:12, and also several times in the Gospel of Luke. James 4:11-12 says, "Do not judge or slander your brothers," which is what Jesus says, "Judge not, lest you be judged," Matthew 7:1-5.

Both Jesus and James specify moths and rust as the things that destroy our wealth, in James 5:2 and Matthew 6:19. "The Lord is coming," James says in 5:8-9 as does Jesus throughout Matthew 24 and 25. James speaks against taking oaths in 5:12, which Jesus does in the Sermon on the Mount: "Let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no'...take no oaths." James has clearly meditated on the teachings of Jesus. It is almost as though it penetrated every pore of his being. And whenever he thinks about the Christian life, he thinks about the words of Jesus. That is the way that James testifies to Jesus, by testifying that He is the Lord of our daily conduct.

The whole New Testament has something unique in each book, something special to say about the person, the work, the lordship, and the salvation of Jesus.