

*“The Lordship of Jesus Christ” (James 1:1)*  
Mission Bible Fellowship (11-25-2018) Pastor Larry Nelson

**Introduction:**

1. Please open your Bibles to the Book of James.
2. I would like to focus our time this morning on the Lordship of Jesus Christ, as it is revealed in the first verse of the Book of James, which is unique among all the other Books of the New Testament.
  - a. While the Apostle Paul’s writing style begins with a foundation of theology, and then moves on to practical application:, the Book of James is more like the Book of Proverbs, as it addresses wise Christian living, by making one strong command after another.
  - b. James provides us with a clear verse-by-verse blueprint of what genuine Christian behavior is supposed to look like.
3. Counterfeiting has always been a problem in almost every culture.
  - a. And although it is terribly unfortunate to become a victim of counterfeit money, it is infinitely worse to go through life with a counterfeit faith, which will ultimately land a person in Hell for all eternity.
  - b. Counterfeiting is all about deception, where people are tricked into believing something is genuine, when in fact, it is fake.
  - c. And when it comes to Christianity, Satan is the great counterfeiter, who has produced one false religion after another.
  - d. Listen to Jesus’ words in:

*Matthew 7:21      Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.*

- e. In Acts 26:20, Paul exhorted Jews and Gentiles alike to *“repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.”*
  - i. In other words, our behaviors should match our beliefs, and our deeds should match our doctrines, and our life should match up with our lips.
  - ii. Simply put, James demonstrates that genuine saving faith will always be evidenced by a life of God-honoring, others-loving, good works.

**TRANS:**      So without any further introduction, if you are taking notes, the first point in my sermon outline will be:

**I. The Lordship of Christ (1:1a)**

*James 1:1      “James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ ...”*

- A. Unfortunately, most people just blast past James’ introduction, but it is vitally important that I spend the entirety of my sermon this morning focusing on what is here.

1. As one who used to be a carpenter, I can assure you that the concrete foundation is the

most important part of any building.

- a. The foundation sets the orientation, and level for the building.
- b. If the foundation is out of level or not square, then everything from there up is going to be wrong.

2. And so it is here, in this opening phrase of verse 1, that James has laid the whole foundation for the rest of what he is going to say.
3. If we get this right, then everything else in the book, and in our Christian lives, will make sense.
4. But if we get this wrong, then everything in our lives will be wrong.

B. The Greek word which is translated here as “*bond servant*” in the NASB and “*servant*” in the English Standard Version, is *doulos*, and *doulos* has only one meaning, which is **slave**.

1. Go back to the first English translations: The Wycliffe Bible that was published in 1380, The Tyndale Bible of 1526, The Geneva Bible of 1599, The King James Version of 1611, and 22 other translations which bring us up to the present.
2. In all but two obscure English Bibles, *doulos* is always translated as either *servant* or *bond-servant*.
3. At this point, all of you should be asking, “*Well, then why don’t our English Bibles translate ‘doulos’ as ‘slave’?*”

a. ☺☺☺ Thank you, I’m glad you asked! ☺☺☺

b. The answer is actually quite simple.

c. Because of the horrible worldwide history of slavery, for 100s of years, translators felt that “*slave*” was just too offensive.

d. Since slaves have most often been mistreated by their masters, Bible translators did not want the Lord Jesus Christ to be compared to, or associated with, abusive slave-masters.

e. Please think with me for a moment about the Author of Scripture.

(1) If the Holy Spirit wanted to convey ‘*servanthood*’ to our relationship with Christ, there are at least 6 Greek words that He could have chosen to do so, **but He didn’t**.

(2) Instead, He used the one word *doulos*, which only means one thing in the Greek, and that is **SLAVE!**

(3) So let’s take just a moment to consider the difference between these two words?

(a) If you are a **servant**, then you are an **employee**.

- (b) And as an employee, if you don't like your boss, then you can quit, and go work for someone else.
  - (c) But if you are a **slave**, then you are **owned**.
  - (d) When a slave was bought, he or she became the personal property of their master.
  - (e) The slave had no personal rights, as he existed for only one purpose, and that was to do the will of his master, who held the power of life and death over him.
- (4) During the First Century, there were about 12 million slaves in Mediterranean area alone.
- (a) 1 out of every 5 people in the Roman Empire was a slave
  - (b) They could not own property, nor could they be represented in a court of law.
  - (c) In ancient society, slaves were the lowest of the low, and yet Paul referred to himself as the "slave of Christ" in *Philippians 1:1; Romans 1:1; and Titus 1:1*.
  - (d) James, Peter, Jude, and John all opened their epistles referring to themselves as "slaves of Christ."
- (5) And if we think that is just too negative and demeaning, read how Paul referred to our Lord, in:

*Philippians 2:7-8, who*

7 ... emptied Himself, taking the form of a **slave** (**not** a bond servant), and being made in the likeness of men.

8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

- f. Clearly, there were many different aspects of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son, while Jesus was here on earth, so too there are different biblical descriptions of the Christian's relationship to Christ.

(1) Yes, He is our Savior, our Provider, our Protector, our Advocate, and even our Friend.

(2) But **first** and **foremost** He is our **Lord** (*kurios*), which means **Master**.

(3) And the word **Master** has absolutely no meaning in any culture, apart from the understanding of **slavery**.

(4) Speaking of the Lordship of God the Father, Jesus said:

*John 4:34* "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work."

(5) And so, as slaves of Christ, we must remember, and encourage one another to

remember, that we exist for one purpose, and that is to **honor, worship, glorify** and **obey** our **Master**, the Lord Jesus Christ.

- (6) Clearly, the Bible represents our Lord as a **loving, kind, generous, and self-sacrificing** Master, but He is still our **Lord** and **Master**, who has the right to tell His slaves what to **believe** and how to **behave**.
- g. Christians most often refer to Christ as our “**Savior** and **Lord**”, but the Bible never uses this word order.
- (1) Whenever these two words are used together in scripture, it is always “**Lord** and **Savior**.”
- (2) Which is actually the essence of “*repentance*,” apart from which Jesus said that all mankind will perish, *Luke 13:3*
- (3) As unsaved sinners, we were all traveling down the road of life the wrong way, as we tried to be the masters of our own fate.
- (4) Please turn over to *Ephesians 2*, where Paul describes this hopeless situation in:

*Ephesians 2:1-3*

- 1 *And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,*
- 2 *in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.*
- 3 *Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.*

- (5) Let’s get Scotty to beam us over to the morgue, and here we have ‘Bob.’
- (a) Bob look pretty good, he even smells good.
- (b) But Bob has one basic problem, He is **dead**.
- (c) Bob is totally unable to respond to any physical, emotional, or intellectual stimuli, because Bob is, **dead**.
- (d) Bring in his family, bring in his favorite steak, and Bob won’t even budge, because he is, **dead!**
- (e) Simply put, dead people don’t respond to anything, and that includes those who are “spiritually dead.”
- (f) Although we were born physically alive, we were all born spiritually dead, meaning that the Holy Spirit was not in us.
- (g) And so, there was nothing in us that could respond to the will or ways of God.
- (h) Listen to Paul’s description of the spiritual deadness of all mankind, who are born without Christ in:

*Romans 3:10*

- 10 THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;  
 11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;  
 12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.  
 13 THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,"  
 "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS;  
 14 WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS;  
 15 THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,  
 16 DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,  
 17 AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.  
 18 THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.

- (6) Thankfully, Paul's description of our helpless and hopeless condition does not end there, but he continues in *Ephesians 2:4-5*, by saying:

*Ephesians 2:4-5*

- 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,  
 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ ...

- (7) It is the sovereign, illuminating and regenerating, work of the Holy Spirit which brings the sinner to saving faith and repentance.  
 (8) And *Romans 10:9* is a passage that explains what repentance actually looks like, which is the essence of the Christian's slave/Master relationship with our Lord.

*Romans 10:9*

"... if you confess with your mouth Jesus as **Lord**, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

- (9) Here are two sides of the same coin of salvation:

- (a) To confess Jesus as "**Lord**," also means to confess ourselves to be "**slaves**" of Christ.  
 (b) Christians are not "born again" into God's forever family to have our own will and way.  
 (c) As slaves of Christ, we now have the privilege of living our lives in accordance with **His will** and **way**

4. Certainly, the Master/slave relationship was an offensive message to those who heard the gospel in the First Century!

- a. But just as it was true **then**, it is still true **today!**  
 b. And so, we dare not water down the gospel by preaching a "**Lordless**" salvation, which will not bring redemption to **anyone!**

- (1) Even young children can understand these profound truths.

- (a) Nearly 40 years ago, I was serving a church in the worst ghetto area of

Minneapolis, Minnesota.

- (b) And it was my privilege to evangelize and teach about 200 inner-city children every Sunday.
  - (c) After one lesson, a six or seven year old girl came up to my wife, saying that she wanted to become a Christian.
  - (d) But when Marian asked her if she was ready to receive Jesus as the Lord of her life, without a moment's hesitation, she blurted out, **"NO WAY!, I JUST DON'T WANT TO GO TO HELL!!"**
- (2) And just like this rebellious little girl, many people today are willing to call upon Jesus as their **Savior** from the consequences of sin, but they still refuse to acknowledge Him as the **Lord** and **Master** of their lives.
- (a) Perhaps this is what Jesus had in mind, when He proclaimed in:

*Matthew 7:13-14*

13 *Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it.*

14 *For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

- C. So as I explained before, doulos is by definition, a **slave**, the property of another, a person who has no personal rights or freedoms, who lives or dies at the will of his master.
  - 1. We become doulos, the slaves of Christ, the moment we are "born again" into His forever family, and into His ownership, through repentant faith.
  - 2. And as slaves of Christ, we serve, live, and die, all at the will of our loving Master, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- D. Let's take just a moment to turn over to *1 Corinthians 4:1*, where Paul declares:

*1 Corinthians 4:1* "Let a man regard us in this manner, as **servants** of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."

- 1. And as you might have guessed by now, "servants" does not mean servants, but Paul uses another word here for slave:
  - a. <hu - per - e - tes> was often used to refer to a slave oarsman on a Roman galley ship.
  - b. These ships often had two decks of oarsmen, one on top of the other.
  - c. The <hu - per - e - tes> was literally an under-rower.
  - d. My son was the king of sick jokes, and one day he came home from his Bible class to tell me about the commander of such a vessel speaking to his men:
    - (1) Men I have some good news and some bad news.
    - (2) The good news is that our Emperor is coming on board today.

- (3) The bad news is that he wants to go water skiing!
- e. But in all seriousness, these slaves were chained to their oars.
  - (1) There were no sanitation facilities, and so everything, shall we say, ran down hill onto the <hu - per - e - tes.>
  - (2) And if the ship was sinking, these under-rowers were the first ones to die.
  - (3) Needless to say, if you were a slave, to be a <hu - per - e - tes>, was the worst of the worst.
- f. But Paul was neither complaining, nor implying that being the slave of Christ was a bad thing.
  - (1) By referring to himself as a <hu - per - e - tes>, he was reminding his readers that his death would come sooner, rather than later, and that was OK with him.
  - (2) Paul declared in:

*Philippians 1:21 "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."*

- 2. The point of all this, is that we would all do well to remember that Jesus is not our **buddy!**
  - a. Although He is our kind, self-sacrificing, loving, and benevolent **Savior**, He is first and foremost our **Master**, who alone has the right to tell us how to live, and how to speak, and how to respond, when the trials of life come upon us.
- E. From the time that our children first placed their faith in Christ, and to this very day, the last words that they always hear from Mom, as they go out the door, or hang up the phone are: **"Remember Who you belong to."**
  - 1. As Christians, so many of our questions and rebellious responses would be solved if we would just take a moment and: **Remember Who we belong to**.
  - 2. Unfortunately, many professing Christians have bought into what has been called "*The Prosperity Gospel*" – which is no gospel at all!
    - a. The "*Prosperity Gospel*" is the belief that God wants all His children to be healthy, wealthy, and trouble free.
      - (1) This perversion sees God as little more than a celestial vending machine, where believers drop in a few prayer coins, pull the crank, and out comes the goodies.
      - (2) For more than 60 years, the corrupt peddlers of this swill have turned doulos upside down, where instead of Christians being the slaves of Christ, He becomes the personal **slave** of every so-called believer, as He lives to fulfill all their desires and demands.
    - b. Even though genuine Christians do not go to these extremes, when life is hard, our sinful heart will often lead us to believe that we **deserve** more from God than what we are getting.

(1) So please think with me for a moment about this question:

- (a) Where would all of us be today, if God actually gave us what we **deserve**?
- (b) Clearly, we would all be in Hell!, so let's praise Him for **not** giving us what we **deserve**!

(2) In fact, as slaves of Christ, anything that God brings into our lives, short of Hell, should be seen as a **bonus**!

**TRANS>** So with this in mind, I am looking forward to the next time we are together on December 30<sup>th</sup>, where I plan to cover the 2nd point in our sermon outline, which is: **The Purpose of Suffering** (*James 1:1b-4*)

**CONCLUSION:** But for this morning I would like to give you a few closing encouragements to consider.

1. As our benevolent Lord and Master, Jesus has the right to tell us how to live, and what we are to think, do, and say, in every circumstance of our lives.
2. And lest anyone forgets, *Romans 12:2* reminds us that the “*will of God is good and acceptable and perfect”*, so there is no unkindness or harshness in His Lordship.
3. *1 Corinthians 10:31* is usually the first verse that I have all of my counselees memorize, which summarizes the whole of the Christian life, as it focuses on our Master/slave relationship with God.

*1 Corinthians 10:31* “*Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*”

- a. The Greek rendering of “*glory*” <dox-a>, is a big word, which means “*to honor, praise and magnify.*”
- b. Just as a telescope enables us to see the beauty of the universe more clearly, so God intended that our lives would enable others to see and honor Him.

*Matthew 5:16* “*Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify <dox-a-o> your Father who is in heaven.*”

- c. As slaves of Christ, it is our **duty** and **privilege** to be *telescopes* with a clear lense, so that others will **praise** and **honor** God, as they see **Him** working **in** and **through** us, as we live for **His** will and glory, not our own.
4. Most Bible scholars agree that this book was written by James, the half- brother our Lord.
    - a. When I say “*half-brother*”, we remember that according to *Mark 6:3* Joseph and Mary had other sons and daughters after Jesus was born.
    - b. And yet he does not use his unique relationship with Christ to bolster his authority over his readers.

- c. Instead, he refers to himself as “*doulos*”, “*the slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.*”
  - d. And as such, James will tell us next time how we can have joy, even in the midst of great pain, sorrow, and personal loss.
5. Let’s pray together:
6. Announcement:
- a. I have been told that my sermons can be sort of like trying to take a drink at a fire hydrant under full pressure.
  - b. So if you would like a written transcript of today’s message, just send your request to my email address: [askpastornelson@gmail.com](mailto:askpastornelson@gmail.com), and I’ll get it right out to you.