



Hope Christian Church
Todd Cravens
3 April 2022

Scripture: Romans 15:4-6

Sermon Series: *EMPTY*

Topic: Scripture, Encouragement, Hope

Teaching Part 1: James and Paul

week 7

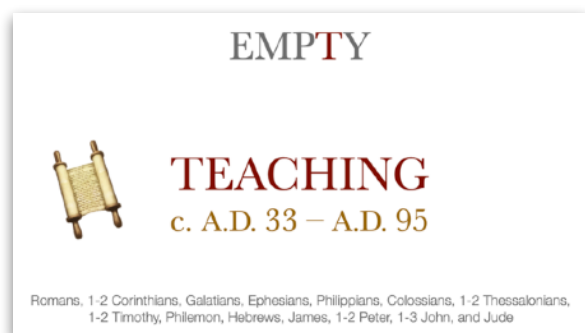
Introduction

We are in week 7 of our series called **EMPTY**, which divides the New Testament (NT) into five different periods of time and takes us through the whole NT. We've already made our way through the first three; EXPECTATIONS, MESSIAH, and PENTECOST. Today we begin TEACHING, part 1. We'll spend three weeks on this this time period. Today we'll look at the letter of James and four of Paul's letters.



TEACHING covers the time period of A.D. 33 to A.D. 95, which is the time when Jesus commissioned his disciples to teach, all the way up until the final book of the NT was written.

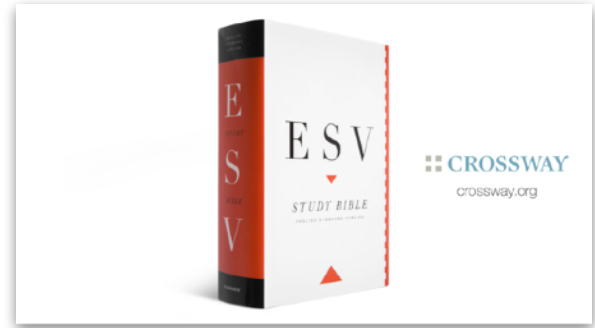
The content of this period contains the letters written by the apostles or their close associates, to local churches, which explain the gospel and apply it to the corporate and individual life of the growing church of Jesus Christ.



If you're following along using the series time line, you'll notice that this period is marked by a scroll, which symbolizes the formation of the doctrine of the church as it was taught by the apostles whom Jesus appointed to "*make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching them to obey all of the commands of Jesus*" (Matt. 28:19-10).

Recommended Resource

If I could recommend only one resource to Christians who want to grow in their understanding of the teachings of Jesus and the context of first century Palestine, then I would recommend the **ESV Study Bible**. It is published by Crossway Books and can be ordered at crossway.org.



This study Bible is filled with valuable resources, study notes, outlines of each book, maps, charts, topical articles, and explanatory commentary on key passages. This is my favorite Bible study tool and I use it each week.

But I will remind you, study notes from study Bibles are merely the words of men, not the Word of God. Be on guard not to ever put more trust in helpful human words than in the Holy Word of God.

The Order of the NT

The canonical order of the NT books is not a chronological order. If the order was chronological, it would be something like this. All dates are approximate.

The NT is ordered according to a Greek publishing convention that ordered the books by genre, author, and length.¹ Thus, after the Gospels and Acts, come the epistles (i.e. letters).

Paul is the most prominent NT author, writing 13 of the 27 NT books. His longest epistle is his letter to the Romans, followed by 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, etc., then James, Peter, John, and Jude.

There are 21 epistles, so for the next three weeks, we'll consider seven each

Chronological Order of NT Books

Date A.D.	Title	Author
45	James	James the brother of Jesus
48	Galatians	Paul
50	1 Thessalonians	Paul
51	2 Thessalonians	Paul
54	Gospel of Mark	Mark
54	1 Corinthians	Paul
55	2 Corinthians	Paul
57	Romans	Paul
60	Gospel of Matthew	Matthew
62	Ephesians	Paul
62	Philippians	Paul
62	Colossians	Paul
62	Philemon	Paul
62	Gospel of Luke	Luke
62	Acts of the Apostles	Luke
63	1 Peter	Peter
64	2 Peter	Peter
64	Titus	Paul
64	1 Timothy	Paul
65	Jude	Jude
65	2 Timothy	Paul
65	Hebrews	?
85	1-3 John	John
90	Gospel of John	John
95	Revelation of John	John

¹ David Palmer, *Casket Empty: God's Plan of Redemption Through History*, *New Testament Study Guide*, p. 184.

week. Today we'll look at James, and all the letters written during Paul's three missionary journeys, which are Galatians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Corinthians, and Romans.

The Letter of James

The opening verse of the Letter of James identifies the author simply as,

"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ..."

James who? Which James? James the son of Zebedee, brother of John and one of the Twelve apostles?² Or James the son of Alphaeus, also one of the Twelve?³ Or some other James? James, the brother of John and son of Zebedee, was the first apostle to be martyred for the sake of the name of Jesus. He was beheaded by Herod Agrippa in A.D. 44.⁴ The only other James who rose to prominence in the Jerusalem church was James, the half-brother of Jesus. Jesus had four⁵ half-brothers, of whom James was the oldest⁶ after Jesus. [Jesus also had at least two sisters as well.]

Throughout Jesus' earthy ministry, his brothers did not believe in him (Jn. 7:5). In fact, on one instance, when a crowd of people had gathered around their family home, we are told that Mary and the four half-brothers gathered together *"to seize him, for they were saying, 'He is out of his mind'"* (Mk. 3:20-21, 31-32). All of this changed for James after Jesus' resurrection.

Jesus appeared to James after his resurrection and this convinced James that Jesus really was God's messiah. Soon afterward James was counted among the apostles (1 Cor. 15:7). James had the most significant voice at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:13-21). Paul referred to him as one of the *"pillars of the church in Jerusalem."*⁷ Over time he came to be called "James the Just" because of his devotion to the law and his persistence in prayer.⁸

What a humble way to begin a letter. *"James, a servant of God..."*. He does not begin by writing, "James **THE** servant of God," but simply and humbly, *"a servant of God..."* The author views himself primarily as a servant. He does not name his accomplishments or list his degrees, he simply wants his readers to know that he is a servant. How many of us would be content to simply be known as "servant of Jesus?" We more easily want our credentials to be known. Please call me, "Rabbi" or "Reverend" or "Father" or "doctor." Jesus warned against

² Mark 1:19; 5:27; 9:2; 10:35.

³ Mark 15:40; Matthew 27:56.

⁴ Acts 12:2.

⁵ James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon.

⁶ Matthew 13:55; cf. 12:46-49. See also Mark 6:3.

⁷ See Galatians 1:19; 2:9.

⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, Second edition., vol. 16, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015), 32–33.

the use of titles.⁹ There is a difference between demonstrating competency in a field and feeding inflated egos. Oh, may the people of God know the difference.

James addresses his letter, *"to the twelve tribes in the dispersion."* He wrote from Jerusalem to the Jewish Christians who had been scattered among the nations outside Palestine, most likely as a result of the intense persecution of believers that arose after the martyrdom of Stephen. James is mostly likely writing some time around **A.D. 45**. If this date is correct, then this is the earliest NT letter written.



The Letter of James has been called "the Proverbs of the New Testament," because of its practical wisdom and call to live out faith in Christ in the normal day to day routine.

This letter was the first book of the Bible that I ever read from start to finish. My oldest brother, after coming home from college, sat me down on his bed when I was about 9 years old and he asked me if I'd ever read through a book of the Bible. I said, "No." He said, "Don't get off this bed until you read through James." He was a lot bigger than me, so I sat there and read it. It was such a blessing. I understood the main ideas. It was the first time I felt like I could read and understand the Bible.

Perseverance in Persecution

There are several themes which arise throughout the letter, but first among them is the call to persevere in faith through seasons of suffering.

James 1:2-4 (ESV) Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

James has unshakable faith in the sovereignty of God. Suffering produces steadfastness. He is firmly convinced that God is always at work through the painful seasons of suffering and testing that all believers will most certainly have to endure in this life. He writes, *when not if* you meet trials of various kinds. Trials and testing of faith will come, but God is perfecting the believer through them. God completes His sanctifying work in the life of the Christian in spite of rather than in the absence of suffering and testing. Paul repeats the same truth saying, that it only *"through many tribulations will we enter the kingdom of God"* (Acts 14:22). And again, *"all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"* (2 Tim. 3:12). Thus, says James, the Christian ought to be joyful, knowing that God is at work and nothing—not even

⁹ See Matthew 23:8-11.

suffering—has the power to inhibit the steadfast love of the Lord from having its full and complete work in your life.

Put Faith Into Action

A second theme in the letter is the call to put faith into action. James commands Christians to “*be doers of the word and not hearers only*” (James 1:22). It’s wonderful to listen to the teaching of Jesus, but better to act on it. The true follower of Christ acts on what she hears. He goes on to teach that “*faith without works is dead*” (Jam. 2:17, 26).

James is concerned with how to know the difference between true faith and fake faith. Thus he asks the question, “How do we know that your faith is genuine?” He answers by explaining that *true, saving faith is a doing faith*. Mere belief without action is not a manifestation of the faith that comes from the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. If your life does not agree with what you say you believe, then you really don’t believe what you say you believe.

James illustrates this by saying this is a kind of demonic faith. James says, “*Do you say you believe in God? That’s great, but so do the demons. They believe in God and tremble in his presence*” (Jam. 2:19). Every demon could pass any theological exam, but none of them obey the teaching of Jesus. Rather they do everything they can oppose Christ and his teaching. James argues that the difference between those who truly are disciples of Jesus and those who are not is that the former obey him while the latter do not.

James vs. Paul?

On this issue, many have seen here a conflict or a contradiction between what James taught and what the apostle Paul taught. James explains that saving faith is an active faith. How do we know that **Abraham’s** faith or **Rahab’s** faith in God was real? The answer is that we can know their faith was real because of their actions. Abraham’s faith was justified by his actions. Rahab’s faith was justified by her actions. We see the reality of Abraham’s faith in God by his obedience to God’s command to take Isaac up on the mountain and offer him to the Lord. We see the reality of Rehab’s faith by her acceptance and help of the two Israelite spies whom she assisted and supported. Thus, James concludes,

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. **James 2:24 (ESV)**

But the critical question is to ask, “Justified in the sight of whom?” The entire context of James would answer that question by saying, “In the sight of the community.” How do we in the Christian community know that each other’s faith is real? You know my faith is real by watching what I do. I know your faith is real by watching what you do. If your actions accord with your faith, then I know your faith is real. But if your actions do not accord with your “faith,” then I have no confidence that your faith is a saving faith and, according to James, neither should you have any confidence that such a faith will save you. Genuine, soul-saving faith, is a living and

active faith. Many people say they have faith in God, but do you see that faith in action, being lived out in their lives? That is the primary concern for James.

It is possible that James had heard a misrepresentation of what Paul had been preaching during his first missionary journey¹⁰ and was responding to what he thought Paul had been teaching. Since the first Jerusalem counsel did not happen until c. A.D. 48 or 49, this letter would have been written before this issue was clarified.

Letter to the Galatians

The next NT letter to be written is Paul's Letter to the Galatians. The letter opens with,

Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—and all the brothers who are with me,
To the churches of Galatia: **Galatians 1:1-2 (ESV)**

The churches in **Galatia**, are located in what today is central Turkey. Paul wrote this letter at the end of his first missionary trip, which concluded in c. A.D. 48. Paul and Barnabas had traveled through this region and planted several churches in this area. This letter is written "**to the churches,**" plural, which means that Paul intends for this letter to be distributed among the several churches and read in all of them.



The primary purpose of the letter is to address an issue that had arisen after Paul's departure. False teachers had come in teaching that it was necessary to be circumcised and keep the law in order to be saved. Paul expresses amazement that the Galatians would "**so quickly turn away from the gospel of grace**" (Gal. 1:6) and to a message of salvation by works. Paul argues that this is not the gospel, but rather a "different gospel," which is actually a false gospel since there is only one gospel (Gal. 1:6-7) and that is a gospel of "grace through Jesus Christ." Paul uses some of his strongest words against these false teachers who were perverting this gospel.

⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. **Galatians 1:8-9 (ESV)**

Paul began by reminding them of how he himself was saved. He shared his testimony with them (Gal. 1:11-2:21). He clearly explained that he was not saved by works, but rather solely

¹⁰ c. A.D. 46-47.

and completely by grace through faith in Jesus. When Jesus revealed himself to Paul, Paul was Saul, a persecutor of the church and one who “**violently tried to destroy it**” (Gal. 1:13). And yet, Jesus chose to be gracious to him, not because he deserved to have the truth revealed to him, for based upon his then present works, he justly deserved the exact opposite! Yet, Paul writes, Jesus “**called me by his grace**” (Gal. 1:15). Thus, Paul concludes, “**a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ**” (2:15). This sounds contrary to what James taught, but keep in mind the crucial question, *Justified in the sight of whom?* Paul continues,

Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”¹¹ **Galatians 3:11** (ESV)

Paul is here quoting Habakuk 2:4, but notice that he answers our question, Justified in the sight of whom? Clearly, when Paul speaks of justification, he is speaking of a person being justified “**before God.**” Paul has an entirely different audience in mind than does James. Whereas when James speaks about justification, he has in mind the audience of one’s fellow man, but when Paul speaks about justification, he has in mind the singular audience of God alone. Before man, our faith is justified by our actions, but before God, no one is justified by actions. In other words, no one can perfectly fulfill the law. No one. No one keeps the law and never breaks it. To prove his point Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26.

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” **Galatians 3:10** (ESV)

Since no one abides by all things written in the Book of the Law, every one is therefore under a curse. Every human being has failed to keep the law in at least one point, thus every human being is under the curse of the law. The law is not gracious. The law is the law and thus is unbending. The only person who has perfectly obeyed God’s good law is Jesus. Thus, Jesus

¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. **Galatians 3:13-14** (ESV)

This is the gospel. He who was innocent, took on himself the curse of those who are guilty, so that those who are guilty could be considered by God as innocent. In doing this, Jesus purchased the right to pour out the blessing of Abraham upon all who believe in him. The blessing is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The ancient blessing that God promised to Abraham was actually the promise of the Holy Spirit. Jesus, through his death, resurrection, ascension has fulfilled God’s ancient promise to Abraham. This was all accomplished by the

¹¹ Another way to translate this quote is, “The one who by faith is righteous will live.” See ESV footnote at Galatians 3:11.

grace of God the Father through the death and resurrection of God the Son. Receiving the benefit of this grace comes through "*hearing with faith*" rather than by "*doing with works*."

² Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? **Galatians 3:2-3 (ESV)**

In other words, if your life in Christ began by hearing and faith, then it will also be completed by hearing and faith. If your salvation began by faith, then your sanctification also will be completed by faith. *If you started in Christ by faith, then you will also stay in Christ by faith.* If you received the Holy Spirit by hearing and faith, then do not ever think that you will be perfected in your Christian life by doing and working. No one earns his way into heaven by accumulating good deeds. One does accumulate *rewards* in heaven by doing good deeds, but no one earns *entrance* into heaven by doing good deeds. The only way into heaven is by faith in the perfect works of Jesus, not your own good works. And Paul would argue that we ought not ever let anyone tell us any different, even if he is angel from heaven. The basis upon which God justifies a person, and gives His Holy Spirit, is upon faith alone, never by works. Therefore, in the sight of God, the only qualification for salvation—for receiving His Holy Spirit—is faith alone in Jesus alone, which is a gift of God's grace alone. Paul writes this letter to persuade the Galatians not to let anyone move them from this conviction.

Letters to Thessalonians

Next two letters written in the NT are Paul's first and second letters to the Christians in Thessalonica. Paul wrote these two letters c. A.D. 50 and 51 near the end of his second missionary journey,¹² which concluded c. A.D. 52.

Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia and had a population of more than 100,000. It was a harbor city that was also located on the Egnatian Way, which was the 450 mile long Roman road that led from Adriatic coast of the Balkan Peninsula in the west to the Byzantium in the east.



Upon his arrival in the city, Paul, as was his custom, went first into the synagogue and reasoned with them from the Scripture that it was necessary for messiah to suffer and die and then be raised from the dead (Acts 17:2-3). Paul did this for three sabbaths in a row. Some Jews became believers, as did many God-fearing Gentiles. Other Jews grew jealous of Paul's increasing popularity. Paul, Silas, and Timothy then turned their attention to the Gentiles and ministered among them for a few weeks and many more became believers. But soon the

¹² c. A.D. 49-52.

jealous Jews stirred up a riotous crowd against them and forced them to flee the city sooner than they would have liked. After a while, Paul was so worried about them that he was willing to be left alone in Athens and sent Timothy away from him back to them to see how they were doing (1 Thes. 3:1-2). When Timothy returned to Paul, he came with good news (1 Thes. 3:6-10). The Thessalonian Christians were doing well. They maintained their faith in Christ and their affection for Paul. This was wonderfully sweet news to Paul, but there were a few concerns that motivated Paul to write two letters to them.

To Encourage Them Through Suffering

First, Paul wrote to encourage them to keep the faith during seasons of suffering. There were two aspects of suffering that Paul addressed. First, was his own suffering, since he had been chased out of town by a mob and had subsequently experienced suffering and persecution in every town to which he went thereafter. Second, the believers who remained were also experiencing persecution for the name of Jesus by the unbelievers in the city. Paul wrote,

...that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. ⁴ For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.

1 Thessalonians 3:3-4 (ESV)

Paul did not want the faith of these new Christians, with whom he had only spent a few weeks, to fail. He did not want them to lose heart by either his sufferings or their own. Rather he wanted them to know that Christians in this broken and cursed world were destined to suffer for the sake of the name of Christ. He had taught them this while he was with them, but it was necessary for him to repeat it. Suffering will come to those who love the name of Jesus.

To Clarify Concerning The Dead (1 Thes. 4:13-18)

A second concern was about those who had died. The Thessalonians were apparently confused about what would happen to their loved ones who were believers in Jesus, but who died before his second coming. Evidently they were concerned that their dear dead believing family and friends would miss out on the return of Jesus because they had died. Paul wrote to teach them, that *"the dead in Christ shall rise first"* (1 Thes. 4:16), then those believers who were still alive would then see Jesus also. In other words, the dead in Christ will not miss anything of Jesus' return. They will see every detail.

Letters to Corinthians

Next we turn to two letters written by Paul on his third missionary journey, first and second Corinthians. Paul wrote the first letter during his three year ministry in Ephesus (Acts 20:31) around c. A.D. 54. The second he wrote from



Macedonia around a year later in A.D. 55. Paul had ministered in Corinth on his second missionary journey, spending a year and a half with new church. He was helped here by Aquilla, Priscilla, Silas, Timothy, Crispus, and Sosthenes (Acts 18:1-11).

Problems in Corinth

There were several problems that prompted Paul to write to the church. First among them were divisions based upon the personality of spiritual leaders. Paul explains that such divisions were completely wrong headed since only Jesus had died for them. Second, the church was wrongly tolerating the sexual sin of one of its members. Paul commanded them to stop treating sexual sin as if it were nothing and to kick the unrepentant man out of their fellowship. Then, Paul writes about the destructive nature of lawsuits among believers, rules about marriage, food sacrificed to idols, the nature of true apostleship, the sin of idolatry, head coverings, the Lord's Supper, spiritual gifts, the meaning of being a member of the church, love, how to structure the corporate worship gatherings, the reality of resurrection, and instructions concerning financial giving. Probably the key verse from this letter is,

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
1 Corinthians 10:31 (ESV)

2 Corinthians

In Paul's second letter, he addressed some of the same concerns and also had to defend his apostleship and explain who a true apostle was. He wrote very emotionally about the nature of gospel ministry (chaps. 2-5), encouragement to holy living (chaps. 6-7), and instructions about giving (chaps. 8-9). One key verse is,

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)

Paul is here describing the process of sanctification, or the gradual process initiated by the Holy Spirit whereby we are changed more and more into the image of Jesus as we increasingly surrender our will to His will.

Letter to the Romans

Finally, we come to Paul's Letter to the Roman Christians. Paul wrote this letter near the end of his third missionary journey¹³ while he was in Corinth around c. A.D. 57.

Paul is probably in his 25th year of ministry. He



¹³ c. A.D. 52-57.

has seen much and done much. He's likely in his mid to late fifties. His primary desire is to take the gospel of Jesus into a land where the gospel has not yet been preaching. He has in mind Spain. He knows he would need the support of local Christians to help him get there. Thus, he wrote this letter to the Christians at Rome to introduce himself, his theology, and his ministry plans in hope of being supported and sent by them on into Spain after first spending some time with them. He was helped in the writing by a man named Tertius and the letter was probably delivered by a woman named Phoebe (Rom. 16:1, 22).

This letter is the longest of all of Paul's letters and the most clearly constructed summary of Christian doctrine found in the NT. In chaps. 1-4 he explains the need for justification through faith is because of sin. In chaps. 5-8 he explains the effects of being justified by faith. In 9-11 he expresses his sadness that the majority of Israel has rejected God's messiah. Then in chaps. 12-16 he explains how the Christian should live out their faith in everyday life. You could say that chapters 1-11 are theological doctrine while chapters 12-16 are theological application of that doctrine.

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." **Romans 1:16-17 (ESV)**

This is the heart of Paul's letter to the Romans. It is the most detailed explanation of Christian doctrine that the salvation God has provided for anyone in this world, whether Jew or Greek, has been provided through Jesus of Nazareth, who is God's chosen global messiah. The blessings that Jesus achieved are given to any and all who put their whole-hearted faith in him and then demonstrate that faith by obediently following Jesus until they die.

The letter to the Romans is a fuller exposition of the truths contained in Paul's letter to the Galatians, which we do not have time to more fully explain. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, minister at Westminster Chapel and one of the greatest preachers of the twentieth century, preached through the book of Romans in 366 sermons that lasted 12 years. I will not even attempt today to explain any more of this "greatest letter ever written" than these two verses.

Conclusion

I will conclude with two sentences from Paul's letter to the Romans.

⁴ For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. ⁵ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Romans 15:4-6 (ESV)**

All that has been written down for us, from OT to NT, has been written down for our instruction, so that we would have endurance and encouragement which are aimed at hope! God wants his people to have hope!

Jesus lived, died, was resurrected, ascended, and poured his Holy Spirit so that we would experience His hope! Jesus suffered so that we would have hope. Jesus revealed himself to his brother James after his resurrection so that we would have hope. James wrote his letter to give Christians hope in Christ. Paul suffered and wrote his letters to give us endurance and hope. We gather together each week so that we might have and maintain endurance and hope! So, let us together with one voice glorify God and magnify the name of Jesus.

Discussion Questions

1. What caught your attention?
2. What did you learn about James?
3. What did you learn about Paul?
4. Do you believe James and Paul are teaching conflicting truths? Why or why not?
5. What was most encouraging to you?
6. What was confusing?