Alright, let's get started. What I want to do today is wrap up our discussion of James and spend most of the time focusing on one particular text, for two reasons: one is because it seems to lie at the heart of James and summarize what is distinctive and unique about his letter. But second, it has caused a fair bit of question and controversy as far as how we read it and what this says about James’ relationship to Paul's letters and teaching. So I want to spend a little time looking at that text in particular, but very briefly summarize two of the other things we talked about.

We said that one way to understand the way James is put together is to see the letter of James as continually cycling through three different themes, sometimes looking at them from slightly different perspectives, the theme of testing and endurance, the theme of wealth and poverty, and then wisdom and speech. I want to say a couple things about all of those things. We’ll focus primarily on chapter 2 in James and James’ teaching in relationship to faith and works, and what he’s trying to emphasize and how we might read that in light of what Paul has said as well, but before we do, let’s open in prayer:

Father, we ask for your presence with us and your enablement as we think about and discuss what is nothing less than your very words and revelation to us. I pray we may better grasp what this text meant to and how it would've been received by the first readers, but at the same time may we continue to hear it as the ongoing revelation of yourself to your people today, and may we understand better how to respond in light of that. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Alright, one of the issues when it comes to interpreting James that we've seen and in your notes—I’m talking now about the theme of faith and works, but to kind of introduce that—we said that the book of James is often read in a post-Pauline context. That is, we have been taught to read it or we’re used to reading it in light of having come to grips with
Paul's letters and what Paul wants to emphasize, especially due to the legacy of Martin Luther and his emphasis on justification being solely by God's grace through faith, and not dependent on any works that we do to merit or earn that. In a sense, that then has become the essence of the pure Gospel that now becomes a filter, or at least a measuring stick, by which we measure all the other books of the New Testament. That would certainly also perhaps lend itself to the fact that the Pauline epistles are situated very nicely right in the center of the New Testament. In a sense, you have the Gospels and Acts before it, but then everything else coming after it, so that at the center of the New Testament canon stands Paul's letters that kind of function as a measuring stick for how we read and understand everything else. So due to the fact that, at least in a sequential reading, the fact that we come to Paul's letters first seems in a sense to set us up for how we have to read the rest of the New Testament. So we come to Hebrews and we come to James and the other letters having Paul's Gospel thoroughly ensconced in our minds that is that God has provided a way for salvation and justification that is based not on any works that I perform to merit or earn that, but based solely on God's gracious action in Christ and the only appropriate response is faith in Jesus Christ. So, we’re saved by God's grace through faith, and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. It doesn't come from human works, so that no one will boast, to use Paul's words from the book of Ephesians.

Now again, that becomes a lens then through which we read the rest of the New Testament, and probably I would suggest that most of us probably subconsciously do that. We seem to give a primacy of place to Paul's letters and that becomes kind of the grid through which we read the rest of the New Testament, and therefore what happens when we come to a book like James is: number one, James will either be completely rejected or at least neglected as Martin Luther did when you stand it up against Paul. James either gets rejected or at least neglected and relegated to the back of the New Testament canon. Or we reinterpret James—we kind of rescue James from James. We want to make him sound like Paul, so we reinterpret or read James in a way that he sounds just like Paul's message of “your saved solely by God's grace and through faith and not based on any human works.”
New Testament students often call this establishing a canon within the canon so within the larger canon of New Testament Scripture. There's one set of works that kind of emerges as the measuring stick for all the other books within the canon—kind of an emerging canon, a measuring stick that has central place in the canon by which all the other books should be read and interpreted, and those are usually Paul's letters. Again, a lot of that goes back to the legacy of Martin Luther, which we learn a lot of good things from, but one of the things that has been passed down I think to us often is that we’re taught to read the New Testament through the lens of Paul's letters. So again, either James is ignored or rejected at worst or else James is re-configured and reinterpreted in light of Paul's letters such as Romans and Galatians.

However, a couple things: number one, as I said, there were a number of early New Testament lists of New Testament books that actually, intriguingly, put James before Paul's letters, and I think that simply suggests that the early church was not interested in ordering the books in terms of importance or how that should affect the way we necessarily read them. It would be interesting to ask though if sequentially (and this is impossible because we have been so been influenced by this way of thinking about the New Testament) what would happen if we came to James first and then we read Paul's letters later. Would that make a difference in the way we interpret Paul? Would we read Paul instead, in light of James, as opposed to vice versa? But I doubt that the early church was interested in ordering the books in a way that gave the primacy of place and focus to any particular books.

The reason Paul's letters easily follow Acts is most likely because most of the book of Acts all the way to the end is dominated by the apostle Paul, so it's natural that his books would come next. That does not mean that they’re more important or that they should provide a lens through which to read the rest of the New Testament. But I am convinced though that when it comes to the letter of James and thinking in terms of James and Paul is that first of all it is legitimate to try to reconcile them and put them together. After all, the church did include both of them in its Scriptures so that it is necessary. At the end of the
day, it is necessary to ask how these two books relate and to put the pieces of the puzzle together. I think that's required as part of canonical Scripture—that the church allowed these as the theological witnesses to God's revelation, that the church would include books like James and Paul's epistle so that at the end of the day, we do need to ask how they relate to each other and how we can fit them together.

At the same time though, before we do that, I'm convinced that we need to allow each of the authors to have their own voice—that is, we can’t make James sounds like Paul nor vice versa, but we need to allow them to have their own voice and their own distinctive flavor before we then put them together and ask how they might accompany to complement each other, or how they might cohere together within this complete canon of writings that the church confesses as its Scripture. So that’s what I want to do. I want to ask the question, first of all perhaps, what seems to be unique about these authors? What were they emphasizing? Why did they write the way they did before we ask the question of how do we put these together? Do James and Paul conflict with each other? Are they diametrically opposed to one another? Are they saying the same thing? Are they saying similar things with different emphases? How are we to put them together? We’ll talk a little bit about that again.

The section that I have primarily in mind is James chapter 2 and starting with verse 14 which is the most extended section on James’ teaching related to faith and works. Although this is not the only place he says it, he says something about works and faith all the way back in chapter 1 in the very first verses and mentions it elsewhere. But this is the most extended teaching where James says, “what good is it my brothers and sisters if you say you have faith but you do not have works. Can that faith save you? If a brother or sister is lacking clothes and lacking daily food and one of you says to them ‘go in peace keep warm and eat your fill’ and yet you do not supply their needs, what is the good of that faith? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead, but someone will say, you have faith and I have works; show me your faith apart from your works, and I, by my works, will show you faith. You believe that God is one, then you do well, but even the demons believe that and
they shudder. Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is dead? Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by those works, thus the Scripture was fulfilled that said, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’” This is a text that Paul quotes as well, now James quotes it to demonstrate that, “Abraham was justified by his works and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone,” and I'll stop there.

And it’s that last verse that has gotten most of the attention, because it seems at least formally and on a verbal level to conflict with what Paul said in Romans and Galatians: that you’re justified not by works, but only by faith in Jesus Christ so that in Galatians and Romans Paul makes that statement that a person is justified. In Galatians: and we know that we are justified not by works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, so one can't help but wonder what leads James to formulate in such a way as to say you’re justified by works and not by faith alone. The first thing to clear up is: I doubt that James was responding to Paul or vice versa. I doubt that the James and Paul were writing in light of each other, and some have suggested maybe James was responding to an overreaction by Paul, or some have overreacted to Paul's writings and now James' response to that. Some have said James outright disagrees with Paul but I really doubt that there is good evidence that James and Paul were aware of each other and one of them is writing to respond to the other. So what is up? What's going on?

The first thing I think we need to do as we look at James chapter 2 is understand—and I'm focusing again specifically on this last verse I just read, that seems to be the most blatantly in conflict with Paul's statements where James says, you’re justified not by faith alone but by works, as opposed to Paul saying no you’re justified faith in Jesus Christ and not by works. First of all it's important to understand that certain components of those statements might be used differently by the separate authors. But first of all, it seems to me that the first way to handle the difference between James and Paul is to understand
that James and Paul are both addressing very different issues and problems. If you remember back to our discussion particularly of Galatians is Paul was embroiled in kind of a debate with a group that has been labeled Judaizers.

Those who were suggesting that, in order to become God's true people, Gentiles had to submit to the law of Moses. Yes, faith in Christ was necessary, but one also had to submit to the Mosaic law, and Romans even talked about the Jews boasting in their pedigree in the fact that they are Jewish children of Abraham by birth, the fact that they possess the law. The tendency was for them to boast in that and their standing in status as a sign they were truly God's people. So the problem that Paul was addressing was primarily both legalism and nationalism. Nationalism using the law to distinguish Jew and Gentile, but by relying on that law, and forcing that on the Gentiles, they were also guilty of legalism—that is, relying on the performance of works of the law as a way of being declared righteous or vindicated or being justified.

James is addressing a very very different issue. Again, part of the problem when we start reading this text, we usually start with verse 18 in James chapter 2, but actually the main theme in chapter 2 is not faith and works. The main theme is that theme of poverty and wealth again in verse 14 before James ever starts talking about faith and works. Here's how he introduces it: “What good is it my brothers and sisters if you say you have faith but you do not have works? Can that faith save you if a brother or sister lacks clothes and daily food and one of you says ‘go in peace and be warmed be filled,’ but you do nothing to supply their needs. What good is that faith? That faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” So James’ whole discussion of faith and works comes within the context of the failure of some of his readers to help those who are in dire need. He says that if you see a brother and sister who is in dire need, they don’t have any clothes they don't have any food, and you just say, “go in peace and be warmed be filled,” and you don't bother to do anything about it, that's the problem James is addressing—almost, and in some senses, the opposite of Paul's problem.

Paul is addressing the problem of those who are relying on their Jewish heritage and
possession of the law and forcing that on Gentiles. James is addressing just the opposite problem: those who are excusing their need to show deeds of love and charity to those in dire need. Sweeping that all under the rug by the fact that they have faith. James now is going to respond to that, and so I think that's the first clue: the fact that James and Paul are addressing two very separate issues or problems; we can’t just put them together and starts asking how do we reconcile these? How do we make James sound more like Paul? But instead we have to start with the fact that these two authors are addressing completely different issues and we don't know exactly what James would've said to Paul’s situation or how Paul would've addressed James’ situation necessarily but again we do know that Paul is addressing issues of legalism and nationalism in relationship to the Mosaic law. James is addressing an indifference, a failure to show deeds of love and charity, and simply showing indifference to someone who is in dire need.

The other thing to realize in these two statements is the statement by Paul you're saved by grace through faith, you're saved by faith in Jesus Christ and not by works of the law, and James’ statement that you're not saved by faith alone but you are saved by works. James and Paul, in those two statements, are using “faith” in a slightly different way. Although I think that James and Paul would largely both agree on what they think true faith is. But in these statements when Paul says you're only saved by faith and when James says you're not saved by faith alone, they’re using “faith” in slightly different ways. For Paul, when Paul says one is justified by faith in Jesus Christ, I think he uses the word “faith” primarily in its sense of trust and commitment to the person of Jesus Christ. Our wholehearted trust and commitment in Jesus Christ. Whereas when James says you're not justified by faith alone, I think the context makes clear that he's referring primarily just to an intellectual assent to correct belief and the reason for that is James basically tells us in chapter 2 verse 19 you believe that God is one which is a reflection of the Jewish Shema “Hear O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one.” So he says you believe that God is one. That's good. You do well. That's what you should believe, but then he goes on and says that even the demons believe this and they shudder at the prospect. So I think what
James is saying is that the mere profession of faith in the one true God is not enough, and one who can only profess or utter a correct profession that Jesus Christ is one, while intellectually that is correct, has a faith that's no different than the demons who confessed to understand the same thing.

Now that does not mean that there is no intellectual component of faith. James is not saying this is wrong or unnecessary. He’s just saying that's not enough—that that's only part of the picture, and I think what James is going to go on to demonstrate is that there is, as I think throughout church history has been demonstrated through a number of thinkers, there is an intellectual component to faith definitely not believing in something that is not true. We can't prove it's true. That's not faith, that’s being gullible. But faith is trusting. Faith is trusting in God and his promises, and so James says that to simply have a faith that believes and confesses that God is one—yes, that's good and it's true, but that’s insufficient faith. That's only part of the picture, and what James is going to go on and suggest, we’ll see in just a moment that that is only the starting point.

Actually I think for James, he understands three components of faith, but he sees them related to each other and interacting. One of them as we said, already is intellectual: a belief in God that God is one. But the second and similar to Paul's, we said what Paul means by faith is James understands faith as especially in light of the Old Testament, as a commitment, and is a trust in someone who is trustworthy. Yet, there’s a third component. So we have an intellectual assent to a correct belief in who God is, second a commitment to that trust--a wholehearted commitment to that--but the third component is a faithfulness to that trust and commitment are actually issues in an ongoing faithfulness that demonstrates itself even in the midst of testing. In other words, it’s as if James says that a true trust and commitment will eventually become true faithfulness, and that is the one who trusts and commits then lives faithfully to the promises of and to the commands of the One that they have faith in.

So those three ideas: intellectual belief in assent of who God is, a wholehearted trust and commitment, but an ongoing faithfulness that, especially in the light of testing that
faith. We’ll see that's exactly why James uses Abraham is an example. He's an example of all three of those components of faith. Again, I don't want to say types of faith—that’s not what James is saying. You can’t have faith without having all three. That's James’ point: that just one of those is not true faith. What we will talk about a little bit later is, actually I'm not convinced that James and Paul really understand faith any differently. They might emphasize the way they put those three elements together might be different but, for example, certainly Paul is interested in the intellectual element of faith understanding, true belief in Jesus Christ and God the Creator, and as we’ve seen, Paul is certainly interested in wholehearted commitment and trust in the person of Jesus Christ and in God's promises.

Yet certainly we’ll see Paul is also interested in the ongoing faithfulness which is part of that which is exemplified in obedience. And again, I don’t want to talk about them as three separate things. They're all essential parts or essential aspects of the one true faith and James’ problem is he's addressing the readers who are satisfied with just that first element, maybe even a second element too. A trust or commitment but especially one that doesn't go much beyond an intellectual assent. Yes, God is one, but when it comes to the other aspects of a complete commitment that manifests itself in ongoing faithfulness, even when tested, is where his readers seem to lack. James is not saying you have inadequate faith. He’s saying you don’t have faith at all. How much more clearly can you be when you say that your faith is dead? It doesn’t say it’s sick or it just needs to be fanned a little bit, but that your faith is dead. It's not that he’s saying you’ve got part of faith right, you just need to kind of work it out a little bit. He’s saying, “No, if you don’t have the whole thing, your faith is dead, it’s useless.”

So, again, Paul addressing Judaizers who are trying to force Gentiles to submit to the law of Moses, emphasizing the law as the boundary markers, a true identifying factor for belonging to the people of God, so Paul's addressing issues of legalism and nationalism, James is addressing the problem of indifference, those that claim to have faith but do not bother to do anything about someone who is in dire need. So James says, “How can that be real faith.” Again they’re both using faith differently Paul when he says you’re justified by
faith and not by works he's emphasizing a complete and total trust and commitment to the person of Jesus Christ. When James says you're not justified by faith alone, I think he's referring especially to the mere assent to the correct belief that his God is one and is somehow thinking that that is sufficient now. When Paul says you're not justified by works of the law he's primarily again referring to the Mosaic law as a specifically used by the Judaizers as a sign, as a boundary marker, of those who belong to the people of God. The law is something that is relied upon and even boasting in their ability to keep it. Whereas for James I'm not sure if he would've necessarily excluded the Old Testament law or parts of it, but when James talks about works in chapter 2, what's he primarily focusing on based on what I just read when James says you're not justified by faith but by works. What works particularly in chapter 2 does James have in mind? Caring for the poor. Deeds of love and charity, which were commanded by the Mosaic law. That’s where James got it. I’m sure and the teaching of Jesus as well, but when James talks about works he's primarily focusing not on the Old Testament law as a boundary marker or boasting in one's possession of the law and keeping it, but he’s focusing on deeds of love and charity to those in dire need, to the poor. So when he says you're not justified to paraphrase James you're not justified by faith alone, that is simply by assenting to correct belief in God, but your justified by works that is by showing compassion and love and charity to those who are in dire need and to turn your back on that how can you claim to have true faith when you see that situation and do nothing about it and turn your back on that? By the way, the word “justify” this is a little trickier. I’m not sure exactly what the difference might be between Paul and James, despite some of the reading I've done on it.

Paul does seem to emphasize the initial entrance into relationship with God as being vindicated and being justified, whereas James at the very least seems to reflect the Old Testament notion where good deeds are also considered as part of the facts to be considered, when declaring someone vindicated or righteous. So James seems to include then both what Paul includes—yes, we’re justified by faith—but also including the works that follow from that or the works that exemplify that. For example, look at the example he
uses from Abraham. He says, “Do you want to be shown that faith apart from works is barren? Was not our ancestor?” That's interesting if he’s addressing, as we understood chapter 1, verse 1, James is addressing those who are literally Jews, who are dispersed and now separated from their homeland from Jerusalem. Now he says, “Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?” What text does that come from? If you remember what you learned in the Old Testament survey, can you at least tell me the book? Genesis. Does anyone remember roughly where that takes place? What's the story that lies behind this really brief reference in James. It happens in Genesis chapter 22, and this is going to be important. Chapter 22 is the record of where Abraham is commanded by God to take Isaac up the mountain to sacrifice him, and of course he is stopped. In fact, Genesis 22 begins by a narrative comment that makes it clear that God's intention is to test Abraham and to test his faith. So James is certainly correct in using this example, but James starts with Genesis 22 and says, “Was not Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?” Then he says, “You see that faith was active along with works and faith was brought to completion by the works, thus the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him [or reckoned him] as righteousness,’ which comes from chapter 15 five chapters earlier.

So basically what James seems to be aware of is that distinction between the initial declaration based on Abraham's trust in God but then the testing of that trust, the testing of that faith, also issues some justifications. So I think basically James is taking the entire picture, both the initial entrance into a relationship with God and the ongoing testing of that and demonstration of its validity, so that James can say this verse is very interesting. I think in verse 22 you see that faith was working along with works and was brought to completion by works. In other words, it's as if James is saying faith by itself in a sense is incomplete until it is brought to perfection or completion through works, and that's why you can say that faith alone is not enough. It must be brought to perfection, in completion. It must be shown to be valid through the works that one performs. Otherwise, he says, it’s dead, it's useless, and it’s not able to save you.
James has this understanding of faith as well as both the initial commitment and trust but that is simply part of faith to be tested and shown and perfected through one's good works. It is validated through one's good work. It is brought to maturity and perfection. It's interesting that when he introduces his quote from Genesis 15 he says the Scripture was fulfilled “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.” He says that was fulfilled when Abraham offered his son Isaac on the altar. Why? Because those that work that active obedience are perfecting and showing it to be valid, his genuine active commitment trust in God himself and his promises. Without the latter the former simply is dead. It’s nonexistent. I like the way one commentary put it simply the only true faith is a faithful faith. That's a pretty accurate summary of what James was saying. The only true faith, the faith that is genuine that James says saves one is one that is faithful, one that validates itself and perfects itself through the ongoing obedience and faithfulness of the one who claims that faith and a true trust and commitment in God himself. So when we ask him about the relationship more clearly between James and Paul I guess I would understand it like this: I would see James and Paul as within the canon, without having James and Paul here to stage a debate telling us exactly what they think, at least within the New Testament canon I find them as highly complementary of each other and not at odds with each other or not in contradiction at all. So now we’re moving onto the stage, how do we reconcile these two voices? In fact, as we’ve already seen Paul clearly thinks that faith is not just intellectual Paul clearly thinks that it's not enough just to claim to have faith in Jesus Christ, and furthermore Paul is equally clear that true faith is always accompanied by and associated with work.

Go back to Ephesians chapter 2. We all know the first part, “you’re saved by grace through faith and it's not of yourselves it’s the gift of God it's not of works so that no one might boast.” Then he goes on says using new creation and new covenant language, we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works. The one who has faith participates in a new creation that necessarily entails works. Furthermore, if you remember all the blessings of salvation the Paul articulates are tied into the new covenant. Part of the new
covenant is that God provides us with a new heart and the ability to keep his commands. So by definition, participating in the new covenant means obedience, it's inescapable. So in light of the broader understanding of the new covenant and new creation Paul himself would certainly see works playing a role in one's faith and would also, I think, agree with James that the two are not separate. However it's hard to say though whether Paul would've ever said things in the same way James did or whether James would've articulated himself exactly like Paul did. They still have maintained very different emphasis.

I like what one person said. He said at least if we got the Paul of the New Testament and the James of the New Testament together and they were talking discussing this issue, he said, I'm sure there would be a lot of smiling and shaking their head, Yes and a lot of agreement. Yet there might've also been a raised eyebrow or two and a look of exclamation and not because of disagreement but because of how it was said and how it was emphasized. So again when we think about the role that the two play within the broader New Testament canon one way to think about it is like this. Perhaps when we are tempted to somehow boast in our own pedigree, in our own status and ability, and when we are tempted to take pride in our own works and our own ability to do what God asks of us. Perhaps it's at that point where we need to hear the voice of Paul that you're saved only by God's grace through faith, and it doesn't come about from good works. However, at those points are our lies where we are tempted to think that somehow our faith is enough and perhaps for various reasons maybe to add the desire to avoid having works be part of our salvation when we think that somehow good works are not that important or that we can follow our own agenda or somehow that we can simply rest assured on some past conversion experience no matter what's going on in the present, then we need to hear the words of James that you're not saved by faith alone but only by works. So I think the two voices play a complementary role in the canon and they function again going back to the problems. They function to address analogous problems in our lives when we’re tempted to rely on ourselves in our own abilities and take pride in that or simply destroy ourselves and beat ourselves up because we somehow haven't done enough good works is when we need
to hear Paul's voice again. When we’re tempted to go in the opposite direction and think that they really don't matter for various reasons, or that we can simply rest secure in some past salvation experience then we need to hear James’ voice.

I just want to briefly look at two other themes. I know they're not in your notes but just a couple other themes very quickly from James. I'm still not sure I've really articulated the way I want to but that’s the best I can do right now. James is important because we do live in a time when we want to and rightly so, to emphasize God's love and grace but, on the other hand, I would be so bold as to state that that the New Testament holds out no hope for anyone that does not manifest some kind of a change in their life a transformation in their life. Not that we can determine what that is or what that has to look like or how that has to progress but the New Testament offers no assurance for someone that simply does not produce a shred of evidence that they have a true genuine faith in the terms James is describing whether it’s Paul or James.

I had two other themes to look at briefly: trials and endurance and again these are not in your notes but trials and endurance or the theme of patience in the midst of trials is one of those things that cycles throughout James a couple times in chapter 1. You find two parts of the chapter that once again seemed to be almost be at odds with each other. James chapter 1 begins by saying, “my brothers and sisters whenever you face trials of different kinds, consider it all joy because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance.” The assumption is that God is the one testing our faith just as he did with Abraham. So, on the one hand, James says God can bring trials into our lives to strengthen our faith and to test it to make it stronger. Yet then he’ll turn around a few verses later and he’ll say in verse 13 no one, when they are tested, should say I am being tempted by God for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. But one is tempted by their own desire being lured and enticed by it. Then when desire has conceived it gives birth to sin and that sin when it is fully grown gives birth to death. Do not be deceived my beloved brothers.”

The way to put those two together I think is this. God brings trials so that our faith
becomes stronger yet God is not responsible for the temptations that come into our lives or when those trials become temptations to sin God is not responsible. You are lured away by your own desires that then conceive and give birth to sin and death. So James is saying that while God is responsible for the former he is not responsible for the latter, when they turn into temptations to cause us to sin. That happens when we are led away by our own desires and lusts as James says.

Another apparent difference in the book is in chapter 1 verses 9 to 11, again, one of the problems that James seems to be addressing, James being the leader the Jerusalem church and writing to Jewish Christians who are scattered, James is apparently aware of some problems that they are facing. One of them appears to be the social economic disparity within the church and even between the church and those outside of the church. In chapter 1:9-11 James seems to address wealthy Christians within his readership of Jewish Christians. I’m emphasizing here the word “Christians” who are wealthy and who are tempted to evaluate themselves based solely on their wealth. So in chapter 1:9-11 James has let the believer or the Christian who is lowly boast in being raised up and let the rich presumably Jewish Christians who are wealthy let them boast in being brought low because the rich will disappear like the flower of the field. For the sun rises with the scorching heat and withers the field. It's flower falls. Its beauty perishes. It is the same way with the rich in the midst of a busy life. They too will wither away. So the warning is, even for the Christians who are rich and wealthy, not to base their status and evaluate themselves on that which is just as temporary as the flower of the field.

However later on in chapter 5. James seems to be addressing a different group and that is wealthy non-Christians perhaps landowners who are now oppressing the poor and who are doing that so they can basically hoard wealth. So here's how James addresses notice the difference in tone that he takes. He says, “Come now you rich people weep and wail for the miseries that are coming upon you.” That was language from the Old Testament for mourning and sorrow because of judgment your riches have rotted. Remember Jesus saying in the Sermon on the Mount that we put a comparison of in the last
class. But your riches have rotted and your clothes are moth-eaten your gold and silver has rusted and the rest will be evidence against you. It will eat your flesh like fire. You lay up treasures for the last days. Listen the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields which you kept back by fraud now cry out and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived in the earth in luxury and pleasure you have fat in your hearts in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous one who does not resist you and then he tells the poor. He addresses them in the next verse, “Be patient, therefore, until the coming of the Lord.”

So in chapter 5 then James appears to be addressing a different group. Although again that’s debated, some have suggested the first group is non-Christians, as well, and this theme gets cycled through the book on riches and wealthy. He addresses both those of his Christian readers who were wealthy and warning them against inappropriate use of wealth. But now he’s addressing non-Christian wealthy who are oppressing the poor probably members within the church, and warning them of the coming judgment. He’s also calling on his readers to be patient in light of the Lord's coming to set things right. So those are just two sections where you have instructions that could be seen as difficult to put together. But once again I think that once you understand what James is doing, his teaching on wealth and poverty but also on testing and endurance and trials, when you understand what James is doing they’re not conflicting with each other at all but just part of addressing different issues related to these major themes. It doesn't specifically say God brings these trials on you but it does suggest that especially in verse two, “my brothers and sisters whenever you face trials of different kinds, consider it all joy because you know the testing of your faith produces endurance.” So there seems whether you want to say God allows these to come and uses them to test or he causes them the main point is the idea of testing seems to suggest that somehow God is behind this whether as theologians use the term of “allowing” it to happen or does he bring trials intentionally into our lives. Clearly James is thinking in terms of trials as actually in some way testing the faith of those who claim to have faith.
Starting in chapter 5 verse 13, “Are any among you suffering they should pray. Are any cheerful they should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick they should call the elders of the church and have them pray over them anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick and the Lord will raise them up. Anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.” Is that saying that if you call the elders to pray that you will be healed? Some have tried to escape this by saying this is a spiritual sickness in light of the connection. We’re so interested in how James and Paul relate we forget that James probably has a closer connection to the Gospels and to Jesus teaching the more you see that I think the more evident it becomes that the healing here is physical sickness and not spiritual sickness. Is this then kind of a carte blanche of prayer that will solve all ills and problems?

On the one hand, I don't want to water this down and you don't want to qualify James 5 of all kinds of things on this and to endlessly qualify it so that it loses all its power. Maybe we should expect more from God in terms of him healing. However this is not the first time that James' addresses the issue of asking and prayer. For example, in James chapter 4 he says, “conflicts and disputes among you where do they come from. Do they not come from your cravings which are at war within you want something. But you do not have it so you commit murder. You covet something and you cannot obtain it, so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have because you do not ask.” So maybe we could say one reason we don’t have it is because we don't bother to ask. But then he goes on and says, “You ask, but you do not receive because you ask wrongly [with the wrong motives] that is to spend on your pleasure.” So I think at the very least James would expect that we understand chapter 5 in light of that, but sometimes we don't have because we don't bother to ask but sometimes perhaps we ask with wrong motives. But interestingly, at the end of chapter 4 notice he says come now you who say again, now he’s addressing the theme of wealth and riches, “you say today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a country and spend a year there and do business and make money. [he says] Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that
appears for a little while and vanishes. Instead you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or do that as it is you are boasting. You’re arrogant. All such boasting is evil.” So I think James would intend his readers to understand his instructions in chapter 5 in light of his own teaching on asking and praying that when one asks in faith you don't have because you don't ask but also sometimes you don’t have because you ask with wrong motives or he also condemns those who boast and, instead of saying if the Lord wills, we will do this or that. So without watering chapter 5 down or taking the power out of that certainly James means for us to understand that in light of his teaching and starting back in chapter 3 and 4 on asking God and in what it means to have trust and faith in God even in the midst of these trials back in chapter 1.