

Text: James 1:1

Title: To Those Scattered Abroad /Translated by Chung Wi

1. A "Straw Epistle"?

Have any of you who have been attending church for a long time ever heard a sermon on the Book of James? I've been attending church for quite a while myself, but I've never heard a sermon on James. This is my first time preaching on James as a pastor. The reason James is so neglected in churches is largely due to the influence of Martin Luther, the reformer. Luther led the Reformation with the doctrine of justification by faith, meaning salvation is obtained through faith. For him, the Book of James was not a very appealing book. This was because it didn't mention the cross of Jesus Christ even once, and it didn't seem to emphasize faith as much as Paul's epistles. Instead, it emphasized good works, leading him to call it a useless book, even referring to it as a "straw epistle." Is the Book of James really as unimportant and useless as Luther thought?

The name "James" tells us that the author of this letter is James. In English Bibles, he is called James, in Spanish Diego, Tiago, or Santiago, and in French Jacques. In the Hebrew Bible, the name is Jacob. While there was a disciple of Jesus named James, the author of this letter is actually James, the brother of Jesus. People often misunderstand when they hear about Jesus' family or his brothers. They might think, "Didn't Jesus' family not understand his ministry and even persecute him?" But that's not true. In John 2:12, Jesus even had his disciples, his brothers, and his mother accompany him in his ministry. 1 Corinthians 15:7 states that the resurrected Jesus appeared to his brother James. In Acts 15:13, James is described as the leader of the Jerusalem church, making important decisions regarding circumcision and the law. Galatians 2:9 also refers to him as a key figure in the early church's missionary efforts. Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, recorded that James was martyred by stoning. What was the intention and purpose behind this letter written by James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, who ended his life through martyrdom amidst persecution and tribulation?

2. James, a Servant of God and the Lord Jesus

James begins his letter with a self-introduction: "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ..." The phrase "a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ" is a remarkably clear statement of self-identity. It clearly reveals that his masters are God and the Lord

Jesus. We call those who serve God and His Son Jesus as their masters Christians. In the Chinese cultural sphere, they are called “Kidokyodo”, meaning followers of Jesus. First-century Christians lived under Roman rule. From the time of Augustus, the first Roman emperor, Roman emperors called themselves "Kyrios" or "Sebastos." Kyrios means "lord" or "master." The name Augustus itself means "holy, sacred, and venerable." The Greek word with the same meaning is Sebastos (σεβαστός). Under Roman rule, there was only one Kyrios, one master: the Roman emperor. However, James uses the title Kyrios for Jesus. This short phrase contains a confession of faith, indicating that only God and the Lord Jesus Christ are holy, sacred, and worthy of worship. Of course, this was a confession of faith made at the risk of one's life. If Roman emperors or officials had seen this, it would have been a capital offense. There could not be two suns in Rome. Yet James boldly and publicly confesses himself to be a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is a servant? A servant is someone called to fulfill the master's purpose. A servant is not someone who fulfills their own will, but someone who fulfills the master's will. Even though Jesus was his own brother, James did not abandon his identity as a servant, dedicating his life to fulfilling Jesus' will. As I mentioned at the beginning, James was the leader of the Jerusalem church. He was a person in a very high position, but he maintained his identity as a servant. They did not lose their self-identity.

3. The Twelve Tribes Scattered Throughout the World (Diaspora)

Verse 1 immediately follows the sender of the letter with the recipient: "To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations." While our Korean Bible translates this as "those scattered among the nations," the original Greek word is "Diaspora (διασπορά)." The original meaning of diaspora is "to scatter seeds." It refers to people who live as strangers, having left their homeland like scattered seeds. The word diaspora carries many implied meanings. There are reasons why these people are scattered. These are reasons that forced them to leave their homeland. At that time, there were two main reasons for living as a diaspora. First, there were those who left their homeland to escape religious persecution and oppression. Second, there were those who had to leave their homeland due to economic reasons, that is, poverty. Persecution and economic hardship are the underlying factors in the term diaspora. Diasporas are people who live as a minority group in mainstream society. In other words, they were people who lacked the power to resist even when they faced alienation, exclusion, and disadvantages from mainstream society. Because they were not citizens and did not have citizenship rights, they could not even protest in court. They were people who did not receive the protection of the law.

The novel <Black Flower> by novelist Kim Young-ha is a story about the Korean diaspora in Mexico during the late Joseon Dynasty and the Korean Empire period, who lived as migrant workers on henequen plantations in the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico. The plantations where they harvested the leaves of the henequen plant, which is used to make rope, were called haciendas, and the Koreans were contract laborers on these henequen haciendas. However, they were people from a failing country, Joseon... They left their homeland unaware that they would receive no protection and that the contract itself was incredibly unfair. They were unfortunate people who had no choice but to endure the violence and unfair treatment of the farm owners. They were in a miserable situation, not only having to complete a mandatory four-year service period, but also having to repay all the money that had been paid to the brokers in advance before they could be released. A man named Kwon Yong-jun, who acted as an interpreter, is depicted as a truly despicable character who wielded power between the immigrants and the farm owners. Through novels like this, we can imagine the miserable lives of those in the diaspora. Even without reading such novels, we all know from our own experiences as immigrants in America that life in the diaspora is not easy. That's why the Book of James begins in chapter 1, verse 2, with the theme of "trials." James decides to write a letter to those in the diaspora who are facing various trials.

4. The Diaspora Letters

It is said that there were "Diaspora Letters" at that time. These were letters sent by religious leaders to people living in scattered communities. The purpose of these letters was to help the people of the diaspora, who were living amidst various trials and difficulties, to maintain their individual and collective identity and ethics. The Book of James can be considered a type of diaspora letter, written by James, a leader of the Jerusalem church, to Christians living in scattered communities. The expression "twelve tribes" refers, in a narrow sense, to Jewish Christians. In a broader sense, it can be considered a metaphorical expression for spiritual Israel. These were Christians who believed in Jesus Christ as their Lord and were in a covenant relationship with God, but were living scattered abroad. Because they were separated from their original roots and living in scattered communities, they were easily susceptible to losing their identity and facing crises in their lives. For them, maintaining their cultural, religious, and ethical identity was a crucial issue. This was because if they lost their focus, they were highly likely to be assimilated into the mainstream society. This was because the narrative of the mainstream society was so powerful. The mainstream society was the majority, and the diaspora were the minority.

In the Korean Bible, it is translated as "those scattered throughout the world." The word "world" here refers to mainstream society. The Greek word *cosmos* (κόσμος), which is translated as "world" or "secular" in the Book of James, appears three times throughout the book. In James 1:27, it says, "Keep oneself from being polluted by the world," in 3:6, "The tongue is a world of evil," and in 4:4, "Don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God?" All of these uses are in a negative sense. The Epistle of James refers to the vast and consistent direction of evil that opposes God as "cosmos," or "the world." It describes the world of people living without God as simply "the world." James warns that living according to the world, that is, mainstream society, means turning away from God. In other words, the world moves in a direction contrary to God's purpose and opposes God. The Epistle of James states that behind this world is a personal force that opposes God, which it calls the Devil and demons. In short, the lives of those scattered were in a secular world, a world that was very susceptible to its influence.

5. An Alternative Narrative

Did God scatter His people into the world without any purpose? Absolutely not. God scattered His servants who believe in and follow Him into the world because He had a purpose and a plan. It was a calling not to be tainted by the world, but rather to influence the world (James 1:27). If you get close to ink, you will inevitably get stained. Because I work with a lot of ink, my hands are often stained with ink. No matter how careful I am, it's unavoidable. The entire Epistle of James warns us to discern how deeply the narrative of mainstream society has infiltrated the daily lives of believers. It warns against being deceived and tainted by the world's narrative. Instead, it encourages us to confront that mainstream narrative with an alternative narrative and influence society with it.

What was the biggest narrative for people in the 1st century? It was the narrative of Rome, the narrative of the empire. Roman society, which controlled the entire Mediterranean coast, had a very attractive and powerful narrative. The narrative of mainstream Roman society was about power, wealth, and authority. You've probably heard the phrase "stories create worldviews," right? Living according to a story means living according to the values of that story. Values drive needs and desires. Needs and desires determine our way of life. And that way of life becomes our story. Thus, values are hidden within stories, and these values shape our desires, which in turn determine our actions and way of life, creating a cycle that generates new stories. Therefore, the story we choose to live by is incredibly important. For example, let's say the dominant narrative in society is that a life of wealth

and high status is a valuable life. Then everyone will live according to those values. The story that those who have a lot of money and consume many expensive things are valuable people, and that such a life is a wonderful life, constantly tempts people. It's easy to be influenced by that story. Because it looks appealing, and because people believe they will be valued if they possess these things, they change their way of life to obtain them. They cut ties with poor people and try to associate with those who are more successful than themselves. A way of life based on competition, exclusion, and marginalization is formed, and that way of life creates yet another story. This is why the first story in James chapter 2 begins with the story of the rich and the poor. Thus, the cycle of story-values-desires-way of life-story continues, influencing and shaping everything.

James urges us to live by God's story instead of being influenced by and living as part of the world's story. The dominant narrative of the world subtly infiltrates Christian communities, just as the Kingdom of God spreads invisibly like leaven. The world's story also subtly seeps into the church. James warns that if we don't stay vigilant, we will become confused and lost between these two narratives. One of the important themes in the Book of James, the theme of perfection or wholeness, emerges from this background. We will be discussing this concept of wholeness extensively in the future. It refers to an undivided heart. Living a life of single-minded devotion to Christ and His teachings, without being double-minded, is a very important theme in the Book of James.

6. Those Who Are Sent

The stories of the world are shaped by the history of a society, its geopolitical location, and its ideological and spiritual traditions. Wherever you go in the world, there are stories that dominate Koreans. Koreans are a people who experienced Japanese colonial rule and war. A characteristic of such people is the feeling that no one can take responsibility for them. Because they feel that only they can take responsibility for themselves, the competition among Koreans is more intense than among other ethnic groups. At the heart of this competitive narrative is children's education. Children's academic achievements and careers are treated like medals or report cards for their parents, becoming subjects of comparison. Koreans are quite exhausted by this comparison and competition. In our case, this Korean narrative intersects with the story of American immigrants, a story often expressed as the American Dream. The intersection of these two narratives affects the church community as well. Because comparison and competition are the underlying emotions in many churches, it becomes difficult to build deep fellowship. Fortunately, this

isn't the case in our church, but many immigrant churches experience serious conflicts every time they hold ordination ceremonies. The worldly narrative of comparison and competition thus exerts a powerful influence even within the church. On top of that, there are local stories specific to each region. Rochester certainly has its own story. We need to discern the stories of this society, our ethnic group, and our region that dominate us. When we are immersed in these stories, it's difficult to discern them. We live as part of these stories without even realizing it. In such times, we need to listen to the stories of people outside our community. James, acting as a third party, is telling a story to the scattered community of sojourners. We need to listen to James's letter to see ourselves clearly.

The premise of today's message, which begins the Book of James, is that there is undoubtedly a story underlying the lives of those who are scattered. James didn't just use the phrase "the twelve tribes scattered abroad" casually. It's a designation used to emphasize that they were scattered because of God's purpose. We live scattered because of God's purpose. Another way of saying that there is a purpose is that we are chosen people, called people. God specifically chose and scattered us. God has specifically called us. Don't forget that all of you are called as missionaries to this land of Rochester. You are missionaries chosen by God. I sometimes get asked this question: What is the purpose of our church's existence? This is the greatest purpose of our church's existence. "Sent people," "a sent community"—that is our identity. We are living in this unfamiliar land as people scattered and sent for God's special purpose and will. Whatever we do here, our church must bear witness to the One who sent us. In Matthew 5:14, it says that a city on a hill cannot be hidden. Whatever we do, we cannot hide it. It will be revealed to the world. Our community, like an individual, has a collective personality. Our church has an atmosphere, a purpose that we all strive for together. We are called to show that there is a life that is distinct and different from the world. There are many Koreans in Rochester, but many still don't know about our existence. This may be because we haven't lived lives that are attractive enough. The stories of mainstream society seem so powerful and appealing. But the story of God that we believe in and follow is a bigger, more powerful, and even more compelling story. We are people who have been given the mission to show, through our lives and our community, how beautiful and captivating God's story is. In the coming weeks, James will present a powerful challenge to the scattered community of believers in Rochester, the Dahana Church. Before this message, we must clearly examine ourselves and strive to restore the Christian life and community life that God desires. Let us greet our brothers and sisters, servants of the Lord Jesus, who are scattered and living among us, with sincere hearts. To all of you who will be living in the world this week, I bless you in the

name of the Lord, that you may not be tainted by the world, but instead, through your beautiful conduct, bear witness to the One who sent you.