

GATHERING BY SCATTERING:
GOD'S METHOD OF ADVANCING THE KINGDOM.

James 1:1.
September 8th, 2013

How carefully do you read your utility-bills, hmmm? Probably in the old days, before deregulation, you just glanced at the amount charged and paid it—that's what I used to do. Now, if you're like me, you look more closely and at least *try* to understand—am I right? You can learn a lot in that complicated maize of figures about kilowatt hours, different tariff-rating periods etc.

I'm beginning a series of messages from the general letter of James, today. Often we tend to skip past the introductory verse of letters like this one, not because the greetings are complicated but thinking 'there's nothing much in the greetings', but there's lots to learn here so we're looking at verse one by itself today.

"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings."

We learn firstly about

(1) The Writer *"James ..."*. James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus as Matthew informs us [13 v55]. James, who perhaps joined in when members of Jesus human family urged Him to display His power and talent at the feast of tabernacles in Jerusalem to make the maximum popular impact [John 7].

James was transformed by the Power of the Resurrection of the Saviour and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and who is now communicating to the followers of Jesus.

As he writes he is

[A] conscious of his status before God *"James, a servant of God"*. Yes James, like every Christian believer identified himself as a 'minister' a servant of God. Now you may immediately think 'Stefan that's *your* role to be a Minister'. Well, yes, in the formally-accepted sense of the word I am a 'Minister' certainly. But each Christian serves the Lord in their own individual and distinct way as servants or ministers.

This is a truly humble outlook on service to adopt—aiming the focus of attention away from self and from other people and pointing to Jesus.

I'm sure James had heard Jesus' words "I have not called you servants but friends, because a servant does not know what his master is doing." However, even though there's that sense of dignity and purpose which *every* Christian has, we need to remember to whom we belong and whom we serve and James doesn't forget. The Lord God is *not* our messenger-boy to call on when *we* feel like it, He's king of kings Lord of lords. Whilst conscious of his status before God, James is also

[B] honoured to identify with the Lord Jesus Christ *"James servant of the Lord Jesus Christ"*. After pentecost, we're told that James not only served as a leader in the church at Jerusalem [Galatians 2 v9] but also was later martyred for the faith [Acts 12:1-4]. He was willing to identify with the Lord Jesus Christ, publicly.

Now neither you nor I have the responsibility to be writers of scripture or leaders of the church as James did; however, as you live before the Lord, do you think of yourself as his direct servant? Can you say, ladies, I am the handmaid of the Lord? How dignifying is it to think of yourself like that; it is what we all are you know—God's servants!

All we have is His, are we available to wait on His direction? Are we ready to be identified with the Lord

Jesus?

Have you ever said to another person "you know, I belong to Jesus?" it seems that we comfortably-off Christians are so easily embarrassed about our blessed Lord, whereas those who've most to fear from identifying with Him in the world seem most eager to testify to Him. Well, James the writer is addressing a whole range of issues facing his readers.

We think today, secondly about

(2)The Readers

"the twelve tribes scattered among the nations".

It's not a new thing to say but God is an outgoing, outreaching Being! That's why He Created the universe in general and the world in particular in the first place.

James is writing to Christians, many of whom, like him, were physically and culturally Jewish, but who had come to see Jesus as Messiah. He uses the familiar Old Testament description of the 'twelve tribes scattered' deliberately and literally because this had happened and the Lord was using it to spread the NEWS about Jesus to the known world more rapidly because of it.

The Old Testament ideal was that God Chose one family which became one nation to be a light to the nations. They were to dwell in one geographic place and be Blest there—we read of it in Deuteronomy Twenty-Eight. Should they disobey, which they did, they would be scattered—which happened.

Since Jesus Came, God's broadening river of grace—His Purpose of gathering Gentiles and Jews together into Jesus' fold where there would be one flock and one Shepherd is proceeding. The *"Israel of God"*, as Paul termed the church in Galatians 6 v16, is now being completed throughout the world. Now His one nation is to positively effect *all nations* with His Revealed News of Salvation in Christ.

Certainly, as was the case with the OT people, we do have a tendency to mingle with and be compromised by the people of the world and allow their thinking and behaviour to dominate us; however, God's people of that first generation of the NT church, dispersed, according to God's Plan, into all the world, and we in our day, are to

[A] Sow His Word by teaching and living - broadcast the gospel. As Paul teaches the Galatians the foundational truth of the Gospel which the believers of his day, indeed any believers, must hold onto is that it's the sacrificial death of Jesus as seen on the cross which saves sinners! No circumcision or any other ritual can achieve this salvation; otherwise Jesus died for nothing! Believers as scattered were to respond, supportively, to those leaders who taught them the truth and James will say more about this later.

So what are we doing as individuals to sow God's Word in the world?

* Pray for missionaries and leaders—please keep praying for me as I have opportunities!

* Give to the work of mission through our own denomination or to other Christian agencies?

God's way of gathering all those who are to be saved is by scattering His People throughout the world so they can join in the harvest. This is now not a sign of His displeasure as it was for OT Israel but a means for the Blessing of the world.

When seed is sown or scattered it is intended that it lead to growth. So as we sow His Word we also

[B] Grow His Church, Christ's body by discipling. God's people from all nations now comprise Israel—the holy nation who, as a prince, has power with God. Jesus has Promised that to Him belongs all Authority in heaven and earth, as given by the Father, and so as His people venture into the world to disciple people it's something which advances Jesus' purpose and is pleasing to God.

TO TAKE AWAY:

1. First to consider myself humble – looking to Christ as my Lord—what a privilege!

2. To be included in the triumphant world-wide task of delivering 'the grand news'