

“That There May Be Joy”

James 1:1–4

February 8, 2026

by Pastor Akemi Kanda

○ Introduction

Good morning, everyone. At this time, I have decided that, starting this year, for about three years, I will leave Tsuchiura Megumi Church, where I was raised and have served for many years, and go on to study at the Hapdong Theological Seminary in Suwon, South Korea, commonly called *Hapshin*. Before this departure, I sincerely thank God for giving me the opportunity to preach this farewell sermon, and I thank all of you at Tsuchiura Megumi Church from the bottom of my heart.

In 2018, when I graduated from TCU, I was planning to leave Megumi Church in order to serve in the Japanese-language worship ministry at Selonam Church. At that time, one young person from the church spoke to an acquaintance of mine and made a handmade devotional notebook for me, covering an entire year. In fact, I am thinking of taking that notebook with me again for this study abroad.

On the page dated April 11 in that notebook, Pastor Hong wrote the following words. It is the very passage that we are currently reading together through his expository sermons.

Ephesians 4:1

“Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.”

To live in a way worthy of the calling given by the Lord. And for the apostle Paul, that calling was to become a prisoner for the Lord...

Do I have the resolve to become a prisoner for the Lord...? Ake-chan, do you have the resolve, the calling, to become a prisoner for the Lord...?

Let us become prisoners for the Lord together.

However, after that, the visa necessary for the work was not granted, and the path to Selonam Church was closed.

Yet, thankfully, I was given the opportunity to serve at Megumi Church, and through my work as General Affairs Director and TEENS Director, I was allowed to learn more

about the church and be involved in the practice of mission even more than when I was a seminary student.

On the other hand, as the work continued, my prayers for entering graduate school gradually grew distant, and I began to think, “Perhaps I should give up.”

In the midst of that, in 2023, Pastor Paul came to Megumi Church and prayed for me as well. At that time, he said to me, “Jump in.”

At first, I did not understand what he meant, but as I reflected on it, the thought of graduate school—which I had almost given up on—came to mind. However, at that time, my work as TEENS Director had also begun, and I thought, “This timing is impossible.” Still, I decided to begin praying once more.

Then, in the fall of 2024, when I was given a sabbatical and visited Korea, I was given opportunities to visit several seminaries. During a chapel service I attended at one of them, I was given the same word I had received when I was in Nepal before coming to Korea: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). As if pushed forward by that word, after returning to Japan, I began preparing to enter graduate school, and thankfully, God opened this path for me.

Then, after the new year began, from the 5th, I went to Hapshin to attend a Greek class. On the first day of class, the professor spoke to us, who were feeling nervous, in this way.

In **Galatians 6:17**, Paul says, “I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.” The word translated “marks” here is *stigma* in Greek. This word appears only once in the entire New Testament, and moreover, it is in the plural form. It refers to the many wounds Paul received as he followed the calling to proclaim Jesus Christ and walked as a prisoner of Christ. These are not meaningless or unreasonable wounds. They are the marks of Jesus, engraved because he followed Jesus Christ—testimonies given by Christ, and traces left behind.

From today on, you too will walk a difficult path until death, a path that can hardly be called easy. The next three weeks are also a part of that. It is not because “you must become lower,” nor because “you must give something up,” but because you will pass through the experience of being broken before God. What kinds of traces of following

Christ will you leave behind? Remember these three weeks, and beyond them, the next three years, and then a life of pastoral ministry. Therefore, do not treat these three weeks as merely a time of learning Greek, but spend them as a precious time to face yourselves before God.

When I heard these words, I remembered what Pastor Hong had written in my notebook: “Do you have the resolve, the calling, to become a prisoner for the Lord?” This question is not directed only to pastors, missionaries, evangelists, or those who are specially dedicated. It is a question directed to each and every person who follows Jesus. So today, from the words of the Epistle of James, let us together confirm who Christians are, and how God expects us to live.

Now, I will read today’s Scripture passage. It is from the New Testament, the Epistle of **James 1:1–4**. I will read it: **James 1:1–4**.

○ **A Servant of Christ**

Verse 1 consists of the sender, the recipients, and a greeting. This is a beginning often seen in other New Testament letters. James introduces himself as a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. James was the brother of Jesus and also a central leader of the Jerusalem church.

Such a James introduces himself to the other churches as a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. Rather than his career at the time or his role in the church, he introduces himself solely on the basis of his relationship with God and Jesus. As if, without this, any other title would be meaningless. A person who found his identity within his relationship with God and Jesus—that is who James was.

We often try to find ourselves not within our relationship with God and Jesus, but within the world. Yet through James, we are taught that we too are those who have found ourselves within our relationship with God and Jesus, and that we are people who cannot be explained apart from God and Jesus.

Moreover, James says of himself that he is a servant of God and of Christ. In Japanese, there is only one word “no” to express possession, but in Greek, the fact that he belongs completely to God and to Christ is strongly and repeatedly emphasized. Using the word “servant,” a word that people at the time would immediately understand as meaning one who belongs to a master and is owned by that

master—not independent from the master, but possessed by the master, that is, a servant, a slave. That James—who was the brother of Jesus and a central figure in the Jerusalem church—said this must have given the church a great shock.

And he asks us as well: “Are we now living as servants of Christ? If not servants of Christ, then servants of what are we living as?” If we cling to things other than Christ and live with something else at the center, then we are not servants of Christ, but servants of those things.

The Preacher also says this. **Ecclesiastes 12:1:**

“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years draw near when you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them.’”

And our Master, God, says this to us. **Jeremiah 29:11:**

“For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans for welfare and not for calamity, to give you a future and a hope.”

And Peter also introduces our Master, God, to us in this way. **1 Peter 5:7:**

“Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”

Our Master, God, is the One who cares for us, who establishes plans to give peace, a future, and hope to us who are servants, who brings those plans to pass, and who takes all our anxieties as His own. And when we live as servants of this Master, we are truly able to live in peace, security, and joy.

○ Sojourners

James addresses this letter to the twelve tribes. This does not mean the literal twelve tribes, but refers to believers who have been scattered throughout the world. The phrase “scattered abroad” is also a word that describes who we are. In other words, sojourners.

We gather here at Megumi Church to offer worship, but other Christians are also scattered everywhere, and in various places around the world they build up churches and live out their respective callings. We are those who go out to the ends of the earth. The characteristic of us Christians is that we are both those who gather and those who scatter. On Sundays we gather like this, but from tomorrow we are again sent out to the ends of the earth to which each of us is sent.

What becomes important there, I think, is that just as a kite can rise high because it is connected to a string, we too must continue to be connected to Christ as those who belong to Christ. United together in Christ, we desire to go out even further to the ends of the earth. Even if the wind blows violently, it will be all right. Because we are connected to Christ, we can be scattered with confidence.

○ **How Are We to Live?**

In verse 1, it says, "Greetings." This word can also be translated as "That there may be joy." Why did James say it this way? Within the Epistle of James alone, this word is used as a greeting. Therefore, it seems that James had some intention in greeting them with the words "that there may be joy." Moreover, verse 2 also says, "Consider it all joy." It seems that he is emphasizing joy.

The churches that received the Epistle of James were facing various trials: faith without works, barriers between the poor and the rich, wounds caused by words, conflicts, worldliness, and more. And yet, James says, "That there may be joy. Consider it joy." To this extent, James repeatedly speaks to the church about "joy," no matter how painful or difficult things may be.

Even though they were imperfect and lacking in wisdom, James greeted those who were in trials and difficulties with joy, holding fast to the fact that God had chosen them, given them faith, and made them heirs of the promised kingdom of God.

The walk as servants of Christ is by no means easy. We truly encounter various trials. Even when we look back on the walk of Megumi Church in 2025, and on the walk of each and every one of you, I believe there were many trials. James himself says, "When you encounter various trials."

We encounter various trials concerning finances, human relationships, health, and our own weaknesses and sins. They occur in the midst of everyday life, overlapping one another. Truly, they are "various" trials.

In my own service at Megumi Church up to now as well, I have faced many trials that come from my own sin, weakness, and lack. What I feel at such times is a deep weariness with myself that does not seem to change. I even wonder whether God has

grown weary of someone like me, and I find myself thinking, “Is God really calling someone like me?” I cannot think of it as joy at all.

But James says that no matter what kind of trial we face, we should consider it all joy. And there is a reason James can say this. It is because we are not merely sojourners, but sojourners who belong to God and to Christ, servants of God and Christ. And because there is a Lord who says, “My power is made perfect in weakness,” and James knows through experience that God works in the midst of painful realities. This is the greatness of God that we are so prone to forget.

God is not only our Master; He is our Father. In James 1:18 as well, it says, “In the exercise of His will, He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.” God is the One who gives wisdom to us generously and without reproach, and who gives still more abundant grace. Above all, the Lord leads us to an end in which He is rich in lovingkindness and full of mercy.

The end of Job’s story was that his suffering came to an end, he was blessed, his family increased, his wealth increased, and he lived a full and satisfied life. But we should not take this simply as “the end of Job.” Rather, we should remember, “The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD,” and as James says, “the lovingkindness and mercy of the Lord.” God filled Job’s life with lovingkindness and mercy, and brought it to completion.

James also tells us to let the endurance produced by trials have its perfect work, so that we may become mature and complete, lacking in nothing. When we hear the word “endurance,” we often imagine “gritting our teeth.” But the endurance James speaks of here seems to refer to not giving up halfway, but continuing to remain with God. Endurance that does not leave God, even while wavering, even while voicing weakness, remaining as those who belong to God. And endurance that continues to believe, without doubting God’s work in us, even when we feel like giving up because we see ourselves not changing very much, even though God is leading us toward completion.

When we hear “lacking in nothing,” we tend to imagine a perfect person. But the completion James speaks of is not the disappearance of weakness, but rather that the parts of ourselves we cannot entrust to God gradually decrease.

The One who transforms us into complete persons, brings us to completion, and fulfills His plans is God our Father. When we remember this and walk in it, as James says, we are able to walk without losing the joy that is in the Lord, no matter what our circumstances are. We are not those who follow God after we are put in order. Rather, as we continue to stand before God while still unprepared and incomplete, we are gradually, yet surely, transformed by God. No matter what situation we are in, everything is within God's hands.

In our walk of following Christ, we often think that it is impossible for us because it is hard, because we are weak. Yet even this year, God is inviting us—while carrying our fragile selves—to training in continuing to stand before Him, and into the walk of being servants of Christ.

○ **Conclusion**

From today's passage, we have confirmed who we are, and how we are expected to live. First, we are those who belong to God and to Christ—servants. Therefore, we live always with the Lord at the center. And we are sojourners who go out to the ends of the earth in order to proclaim the gospel. Therefore, we continue to remain connected to Christ, not staying in one place, but going out to where the Lord sends us, and continuing to proclaim Christ. And even in the midst of many trials, because we know that there is the lovingkindness and mercy of the Lord, we do not lose joy. Therefore, in the Lord and together with the Lord, we are able to move forward.

From now on as well, in each place to which we are sent, let us continue to be connected to Christ, and as servants of God and Christ, even while scattered, even while facing trials, let us carry out our mission as Christians with joy, receiving the grace given to us. I too will walk this path for the next three years—without losing joy, as one who belongs to the Lord.

Let us pray.