

STUDIES IN THE EPISTLE OF JAMES – PART 1

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Date: 14-01-2024

Scripture: James 1:1-8

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¹ James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:

Greetings.

² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Heavenly Father, we ask that You would speak to us through Your Spirit, and that You would amplify and open out this text for us. Then Lord, apply it in specific ways to each one of our situations and circumstances and the place where we are in our lives. We pray that through it, You would bring just a ray of sunlight into our lives this morning. in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Most times when we meet people who are going through difficult times, who have just suffered a loss of a family member maybe, or the loss of a job, or going through an affliction, we are hard-pressed on what to say to them. We come up with words of consolation, words of prayer, well-meaning words to help assuage the situation for them.

The words are meant to be calming. They're meant to help the person go through this particular trial. But when you read James, especially these verses, you want to stop and say: Really James? When people go through trials, you want them to consider it pure joy? That sounds a little odd, don't you think? Imagine meeting somebody who has lost a close one, and you say, "Be joyful! You'll be fine; just be joyful." It sounds harsh to even speak those words, and completely insensitive. And yet, when we look at this passage, that's exactly what James is saying. When you go through difficult times, trials, tribulations, consider it joy.

Dr. Warren Wiersbe, who has written extensively, said, "When life hands you a lemon, make some lemonade." We all know what a 'lemon' is. It's maybe that one car that comes out of the assembly line that has a defect, and you're stuck with it. or you try to get it back to the manufacturer, and spend a lot of time trying. But the lemon also, if you take the literal sense, looks so good. it's alluring till you cut it and try to eat it; then it's very bitter. Actually, it was a bumper sticker that he quoted. In other words, when you get something like that, try and make something good out of it. so, when you get a lemon, make lemonade. Try and turn it into something good. That's what James is moving into. He's saying: In this particular area where you're struggling, turn it into a place of joy. That begs the question: How do we do that? How do we get from our trials and tribulations to a place where I can say, "In spite of all that I am facing today, I can be joyful in the Lord."

I'm not talking about happiness here. Happiness, as we know, is based on happenstance or on something that happens, on a circumstance. For example, you can get up in the morning and be in a great mood, sing songs that are so beautiful. Then, all of a sudden, you stub your toe and the song is taken out of your mouth, and you are no longer in a happy mood. That's happiness; it's based on circumstance. Joy is not. Joy is something that is God-given. It's something that comes from God to fill our hearts. And that's what James is talking about. He says, "When you go through trials and tribulations, when the going gets tough, this is the place that you need to park – in that place of joy. Be victors and not victims. There are many biblical characters right through the Bible, and one that comes immediately to mind is Joseph, who went through so much of difficulty and yet remained connected with God all the way through. God saw him through until he was the second-most valuable, important person in Egypt.

So, we try to take this difficult time that we are in, and say: How can I best make sure that I am in a joyful state this morning? Whenever the Lord lays a passage of scripture on my heart, I know that He is actually seeing you all through that passage of scripture, that you're not here by some chance or coincidence, that God has a specific word that is coming through His Word for you, that gets funneled by His Holy Spirit into your life. I know for sure that there are many of you here who are carrying a heavy load, who are facing a difficult time, a situation, or a circumstance. And James is saying: I want you to move away from the heaviness, the anxiety, the stress of that situation to. Place of joyful equilibrium in the Lord.

FOUR IMPERATIVES

Warren Wiersbe says: Four things come to us that we must do to. Move from a place of despondency to a place of joy.

1. **Count.** Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet trials of various kinds. See to it that joy is the attitude that you have.
2. **Know.** Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. He says: Know that the circumstance or the situation that you are facing is not an end in itself. God has a plan to move it, make it into something that is good. So, don't look at it as something that is there to hurt you.
3. **Let** patience finish its work. Let it be completed in you.
4. If any of you lack wisdom, **ask** of God who gives liberally.

Count:

Count it all joy when you fall into various troubles. Notice that he doesn't use the conditional 'if'. He says 'when', meaning that it's not that there may be a time that this could happen. There will be a time that it will happen. It's par for the course, for all of us to face trials and difficulties. And Christians especially must accept it because we look at the words of Jesus. He said, "I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. in the world, you will have tribulation. But take heart, I have overcome the world." Paul too, when he's talking about the disciples in Acts 14:22, says, "To strengthen the souls of the disciples." How? Encouraging them to continue in the faith and saying that through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God. That this journey that we are on is fraught with difficult times, and that we must embrace it and go on.

He also says that there are various kinds of trials that we will meet. Some trials come to us just because we are human – such as falling sick, accidents that happen, disappointments, death, loss of job, and so on. But other trials come because we are Christians. And Paul says to Timothy, "All who

desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” So, trials, tribulations, difficult days are something that you and I need to accept.

If that is the case, what must my response be as a Christian?

James says that the response must be to count it all joy. When he talks about the apostles, when they were hauled before the Sanhedrin for preaching, when they were beaten – “Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name.” They rejoiced about it. Paul says in Romans 5: Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance.

So here again we see that suffering is not an end in itself. It’s a means to an end. God does something with suffering in our lives. So our response is to count it all joy. And the first way to even begin to think like that is to be able to say “thank You God for what You’ve given to me.” Now that’s a tough one! It’s one thing to accept it and say: Okay, I accept that. But it’s another thing to take my trial out of my heart, this particular thing that weighs like a millstone around me, bring it out and say, Thank you God. That isn’t easy. And yet, that is what James is saying, that we look at that thing that is weighing so heavily upon your heart this morning and say: Lord, Your word is saying that I should count it as joy. And so I’m going to thank You for it. When we get into a place where we are thankful, then God’s joy flows into us. How does it happen?

Know:

We need to understand the process of how this joy flows in. He says that we need to know that the testing of our faith produces patience. The right knowledge concerning the value of trials makes it possible to have a joyful attitude. We need to look at the trial and say: It has a value because it helps me in this process of dealing with it and having a sense of joy in my heart. Why? Because trials test our faith. And faith that is tested brings out the best in us. Always. You take gold that is put in the fire – purified. You take an athlete who pushes himself or herself against maybe sloth or laziness – does well. Faith that is tested helps us to align with what God wants us to do and the attitude that God has for us.

I Peter 1:7 says, “So that the tested genuineness of our faith, more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory.

So testing works for us and not against us.

Preaching this sermon feels like pulling teeth for me – sermons like this that deal with some of the realities of our lives. It’s so easy to come across as being trite and not really understanding. For some of you to say “You don’t understand what I’m going through.” And I really don’t. I struggled with this. And yet, I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that this word is for you. If you’re struggling with something, the weight that you’re carrying, a trial you’re going through, God wants to speak directly to you. I don’t know how He’s going to do it, but through whatever it is that you’re hearing, He’ll filter it so that you hear it right. Faith that is tested produces patience.

Let:

And then he says, “Don’t try and fight it. patience, let it run its course.” Sometimes when we go through a difficult time, we try to pull the plug on it, try to fix it ourselves, try to do something. And James is saying: Allow patience to run its course that it will be complete. Because in its completeness, then there is something complete that has been done in you. God is at work through you with that faith that you are using.

Ask:

Then he ends by saying: If anybody, anyone lacks wisdom, we only have to ask God for it and He will give it. You can see I’m struggling here. I don’t know why the Lord has placed such a weight on me

today. But I feel this is for you. If anybody lacks wisdom, ask and God will give generously. God asked Solomon: What do you want? And he asked for wisdom. And God gave him wisdom.

Here's the thing! As I looked at each of these stages, and I was wondering how to present this to you, and not in any way diminish what you are going through personally, I felt that we needed to actually start from v.8 and work ourselves back to v.2. We needed to look at the situation, the circumstance that we were in, that one thing that is weighing heavily, the thing that you came with you to church but you pushed it deep inside while you worshipped. But it's still there. that one thing. Then ask the question: Lord, I need Your wisdom to know how to operate, how to navigate this time. so, start from the bottom of this passage. Ask God for wisdom. Wisdom is different from knowledge. Knowledge is facts that are given. Wisdom is how you use those facts. And God gives us wisdom, taking into consideration, everything that is present in your life. And He says, "I'll give you the wisdom to know exactly what to do, how to navigate at this time."

And once we have that wisdom, then we need to understand that, as we go through it, that God is giving us patience. Patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit. So, as we align with God's wisdom and His will for us, God pours His patience into our hearts. And we know that patience produces endurance. So we will be able to endure it.

Then, as we move to the next step – to celebrate that God is doing something good. That through this thing that you and I are facing, God is doing something good. That through the irritations, maybe a pearl is being formed.

Then finally, to be able to exult in the fact that God has done a wonderful thing in me through this tribulation and this trial, and therefore I will be joyful. Are you with me, beloved? James has got such a great logical sequence. But for us to get from our trial and our tribulation to a place of harmony and joy, we need to go through and understand fully what is happening. That God having allowed it, will give you the wisdom to navigate it. And then for you to know in that wisdom, that He is doing something that is greater than the problem or situation you are facing. Then to exult in that knowledge because something good that God is doing results in joy.

So, I want to leave this with you, that it is possible to be in a state of joy, to consider it pure joy, whatever you may be facing today, however difficult, however weighty it is, that it is possible that you can have joy in the midst of it. God is not saying He'll remove it, but that there will be joy. I just want to close with this thought. We end in prayer, and if you came in this morning having something heavy upon your heart or something that's been weighing over you, some difficulty that you've been carrying, I want to pray for you that you'll make that whole journey from weightiness and anxiety to a place of joy, a joy that comes from God.

I'm reminded of that beautiful song that says: For those tears I died. Those tears that flow down because of the weight of things that you carry, Jesus died for them. Such a beautiful reminder of how much He cares.

Let us pray in Jesus' name. Amen.