

HOW FAITH FACES TRIALS

James 1:1-8

Sermon for Peace Church

April 26, 2009

PURPOSE – To call forth perseverance & prayer from God’s people in the midst of their trials – in the light of faith in Jesus Christ.

MAIN IDEA – True faith in Jesus means that we endure trials knowing that God is forming character in us, asking & trust Him for wisdom unto obedience.

I. INTRODUCTION

Let’s open our Bibles to James 1 (p. 1880)

1. We embark this morning on a series of sermons from this NT letter written by no other than the half-brother of Jesus Himself. Like Jesus, James was the son of Mary. But Joseph was his natural father.

Imagine that family dynamic!!! Jesus – your brother! The one you share a bedroom with; arm wrestle; play soccer with in the backyard; go with to Hebrew school!

(i) Matthew 13 states that Jesus had 4 brothers – James, Joseph, Simon & Judas (who wrote the letter of Jude) – as well some sisters in His immediate family!

But John 7 adds that, during Jesus’ years of public ministry, his brothers did not believe in Him as the unique presence of God on earth! (Had they been too close to Jesus to see Him for who He was? We don’t know. We do know, however, that it always takes special revelation from God for ANYONE to recognize Jesus for who He truly is ...)

A. ... and James did receive that revelation. 1 Cor. 15:7 states that he received a special post-resurrection appearance of the Lord Jesus!

- Then, from the Book of Acts we learn that he became the LEADER of the Church in the City of Jerusalem, following the Day of Pentecost. (Many leadership gifts in that family!)

2. But note how this James introduces himself in verse 1 of this letter.

James, a servant (more literally – a slave – “doulos”) of God & of the Lord Jesus Christ!

= NOT James, son of Mary, brother of Jesus Christ – ... “the one I knew BEFORE He became famous!”

NO! - James – SLAVE / PROPERTY / SERVANT of God and the “LORD” Jesus Christ (= big word – OT word for God – Yahweh).

(i) This is HUMBLE MAN – submissive spirit. known in church history as James the Righteous; James the Just; Camel-Knees James – because of the callousness of his knees as a man of prayer.

This is the kind of man you want to listen to.

= someone that closely connected to Jesus, yet calls himself His slave!

3. Here’s what James will be asking us in the weeks ahead, as we make our way through this book:

HOW REAL IS YOUR FAITH? Let me give you some TESTS (drama)

1:22 – *“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. DO WHAT IT SAYS!”*

2:26 – *“Faith without deeds is dead / useless / false ... not true faith”.*

- James is a very PRACTICAL piece of writing – But he’s not calling us to the MORAL LIFE FIRST. He’s calling us to faith that is manifested in practice!

4. THIS IS EVIDENT in our first section of this letter:

James is writing to Christians who at that time – around 50 AD – had begun to be persecuted. They had lost their homes. (You think losing 20% value of your home is bad ... imagine losing your home itself!) They’d lost possessions. Their businesses were losing customers. Some were being imprisoned, beaten. Out of the city of Jerusalem, they had to flee!

Thus he addresses his audience: *“To the 12 tribes SCATTERED among the nations”.*

(i) Not surprising then, he begins by teaching how true FAITH FACES TRIALS!

Read vv. 2-8

TRUE FAITH FACES TRIALS WITH PERSEVERANCE, ASKING & TRUSTING GOD FOR WISDOM.

5. Before we unpack that statement, we must understand the nature of faith.

Faith has 2 COMPONENTS – knowledge & trust

BOTH - (Ill. – “falling back into someone’s arms - It’s one thing to say I know you’re strong & good / another to trust & fall back – trust is something we SEE in thought & behavior)

(i) Christian faith is built on the knowledge of Jesus Christ. We claim Him as God’s revelation; truth; God’s will on earth.

Christian faith declares Jesus LORD = leader / master / teacher = “I follow & please ...”

... and SAVIOR = forgiver / healer / redeemer / my peace with God! ...

A. To say that I have faith is to say that I will handle life in knowledge & trust of WHO JESUS IS!

(ii) So how does Christian faith respond WHEN trials come.

(Notice James writes “When-ever” you face trials, not “IF” – trials come INEVITABLY in this age. You’re in them right now – some intensely!)

(ii) Jesus faced trials – that’s where faith starts. We just went through Holy Week:

Jesus was WRUNG OUT by trials (friends denying, betraying him; misunderstood, mocked, mis-tried, beaten, spat on, crucified). He even lost his sense of fellowship with God! – “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” = BLACKEST NIGHT

HE WAS THE MOST TRIED & TEMPTED PERSON WHO EVER LIVED!

A. Why? Hebrews 5 tells us – “to LEARN obedience” - to FILL OUT / MATURE His obedience.

He became FULLY OBEDIENT through the sufferings & trials of this life – even unto death on a Cross. So that, whatever people face, He has become their Savior – BOTH in the sense of PAYING for our sins & shortcomings in temptation ... & in sending His Spirit of Truth to GUIDE us through trials – so that we think & do as He did through them.

(iii) Faith follows & loves Jesus through trials – which means saying: “Jesus, I see my trials in your light ... I will face them as you faced them.”

So ... to the degree that FAITH lives in us - (knowledge & trust in Jesus) – here’s what true faith does:

II. CONSIDERING TRIALS PURE JOY

1. FAITH CONSIDERS YOUR TRIALS PURE JOY!

- Is this guy nuts? Does he know what I'm going through?

Job uncertainty / family strains / mortgage stress / feeling a misfit at school / health concerns / job frustrations / future uncertainties / business debt / marriage woes / friends gossiping / kids crying! ...

... loving Jesus means considering trials pure joy!

WHY?

Because of what those trials are developing in you – perseverance & maturity!!

2. That's what Jesus did:

Hebrews 12:2 – *Let's fix our eyes on Jesus, the author & perfecter of our faith, who FOR THE JOY SET BEFORE HIM endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

- He considered trials joyful in the sense that, through them, he was moving FORWARD in salvation ... eventually to the right hand of the throne of God.
- They were INSTRUMENTAL in God's destiny for His life

HE BLAZED THAT PATH FOR US to walk, as well – the author of our faith!

3. "CONSIDER" trials pure joy! It doesn't mean we FEEL joyful about the trials.

This is a mental word - "Consider"; a calculating word = "Count" = weighing & comparing facts – discerning what might come of it all.

= recognize trials for what they are:

God-ordained circumstances custom-designed for your maturity!

Verse 4 – "to make you mature & complete, not lacking anything"

- Not that we achieve perfection in this life, but through trials we are "completed" according to God's plan for our life.

(i) You've heard of the image of trials as God's REFINING FIRE

"How Firm a Foundation" – Hymn # 500 – 4th Stanza:

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply.

The flames shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine

... & I like the additional thought of that goldsmith removing all that dross in order to see a clear reflection of his own image in it!

(ii) As God did with Jesus, He matures us IN OBEDIENCE through trials.

A. I think that this is largely what Paul also had in mind when he wrote in 1 Timothy 2:15:

Women will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

- If you are blessed to raise children – as our MOPS mom are – you will be “saved” (sanctified) through them. They’re a great joy – but, along with it, comes trial:

I.e. – Billy cries at 2:30 in the morning ... you’re being saved!

Hubby’s turn to get him ... you’re being saved ... “count” it pure joy!

You’re trying to respond to an email with hands pulling at your pant legs ... you’re being saved!

4. There are 3 INGREDIENTS that the Holy Spirit uses to mature us in obedience (2 of them we can be intentional about, the third just comes):

We Need:

- (i) Relationships – mentors / people in our life who are the next step in Christian life / Relatives / people (i.e. MOPS – MOPS moms)
- (ii) Spiritual Disciplines – Word / Worship / Prayer / giving / service / fasting
Faithful practice – day in & out = Rhythms
- (iii) Trials of life – they are God-ordained for our sanctification

QUOTE! – Alexander Solzhenitzen - It was granted to me to carry away from my prison years on my bent back, which nearly broke beneath its load, this essential experience: how a human being becomes evil and how good. In the intoxication of youthful successes I had felt myself to be infallible, and I was therefore cruel. In the surfeit of power I was a murderer and an oppressor. In my most evil moments I was convinced that I was doing good, and I was well supplied with systematic arguments. It was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts.... That is why I turn back to the years of my imprisonment and say, sometimes to the astonishment of those about me: “*Bless you, prison!*” I...have served enough time there. I nourished my soul there, and I say without hesitation: “*Bless you, prison,* for having been in my life!” (*The Gulag Archipelago: 1918-1956*, Vol. 2, 615-617)

So true faith in Jesus counts trials joy ... AND RESPONDS TO THEM – committed to obedience – in 2 WAYS: WITH PERSERVERANCE & SEEKING WISDOM

III. WITH PERSEVERANCE & WISDOM

1. “Endurance” is the sense of this word translated “perseverance” in the NIV
= spiritual toughness

Trials build faithfulness & trust – like a runner training for a marathon – measure by measure by measure

HERE’S WHAT PERSEVERANCE LOOKS LIKE:

(i) Perseverance is not giving in to despair & fear = “Not my will, but Thine be done”

(ii) Perseverance is continuing to keep an open heart to others, loving them as best you can – even in the strain:

I.e. – Even on the Cross, Jesus bonded John to Mary and Mary to John – *“Woman, behold your son ... behold, your mother.”*

(iii) Perseverance is living in mercy - *Father, forgive them*

(iv) Perseverance is keeping hope – *Today you’ll be with me in paradise*

(v) Perseverance is keeping trust – *Into thy hands, O Father, I commit my spirit*

(vi) Perseverance is keeping your eyes on the finish line – *“It is finished”*

- Trial do change & pass. Perseverance looks for that finish line, refusing to go wayward
- In the bigger picture, this life is only 70-80 years – perseverance keeps that end in mind.

(vii) Perseverance is also not too proud to claim grace:

Even when we blow it in anger or fear or despair; perseverance gets back up again! – In repentance, claiming forgiveness - As a Japanese proverb puts it, *“Fall 7 times, get up 8”*

Perseverance is not too proud to confess failure.

A. How do you develop a good marriage? Takes perseverance

Good kids / good character / effective ministry / successful business ... perseverance required ... = remaining faithful & obedient through trials.

2. This, James adds, takes WISDOM.

v. 5 – *If any of you lacks wisdom he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.*

(i) Through trials we don't just grin & bear it, we PRAY!

Jesus did in Gethsemane

A. PAUL PRAYED for wisdom when he was tried with his thorn in the flesh

3 times he asked God to take that thorn away – God chose not to.

He sought wisdom about it & God gave it to him – *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”*

- = a CHARACTER ISSUE – God would grant Paul great revelation – that thorn came to keep him from becoming conceited. That thorn kept him dependent & trusting.

(ii) How do you pray in your trials?

To pray for wisdom is to pray FIRST for what you need to remain FAITHFULLY OBEDIENT.

A. Stress cracks us – we get angry in our thoughts, random in our actions, callous toward others. We sometimes even make rash, bad decisions.

WISDOM, Biblically, is a MORAL term. A fool is not intellectually deficient – he's MORALLY deficient. Wisdom therefore refers to the SKILL to live obediently.

B. Now the first prayer that we easily pray in trial is: “LORD, GET ME OUT OF HERE!”
(That's OK. Paul prayed it – but praying for wisdom is different).

C. To pray for wisdom:

- Is to pray for FRIENDS to help you walk through this trial
- To pray for a daily thought to sustain you – moral insight
- To pray for insight from God's perspective – what do you want me to learn?
- To pray for vision to bring God glory through this trial

(iii) Another prayer we easily pray in trials may be WHY ME, LORD? WHY ME?

Am I bad? Are you angry at me? What for?

A. There's certainly VALUE in offering that prayer to God.

- If the purpose of trial is to make us MATURE, then we want to know the IMMATURITIES within us that are holding us back from Christlikeness.

= always bringing our characters to God.

B. But the DANGER with the WHY question is that it's never fully answered – the purposes of God are ultimately beyond our fathoming – and it can lead us away from the HOW

WISDOM prays:

- How do I bring glory to you in the midst of this trial? How do I remain faithful?
- What skills do I need to remain in strong fellowship with your Spirit?

Pastor Warren Wiersbe tells the story about a secretary of his who was going through difficult trials. She had had a stroke, her husband had gone blind, and then he had to be taken to the hospital where, as far as they knew, he would die. Wiersbe saw this woman in church one Sunday and assured her that he was praying for her.

She startled him by asking, "What are you asking God to do?" He replied, "I'm asking God to help you and strengthen you."

"I appreciate that," she said, "but pray about one more thing. Pray that I'll have the wisdom not to waste all of this!"

Wiersbe comments: SHE KNEW THE MEANING OF JAMES 1:5

Asking God for wisdom & TRUSTING HIM for it. That's how James closes this section.

IV. TRUSTING GOD

1. His words remind us of his half-brother, Jesus, who taught, *"Ask & you WILL receive; seek & you WILL find; knock and the door WILL be opened to you ... If you, though evil, know how to give good gifts to your children HOW MUCH MORE WILL your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask."*

Verse 5 – Ask God for wisdom who gives GENEROUSLY, without finding fault.

- The word conveys the sense of DELIGHT in giving, NO RESERVATIONS, no "let me think about it!"

(i) When we ask God for wisdom in our trials, He DOES NOT SAY: "What, you again? You back here begging for more?"

Stephen Cole states: *God never makes you feel cheap or irresponsible for asking again and again.*

2. So when you ask for wisdom – DON'T DOUBT that you will get all that you need ... and generous amounts more!

3. DOUBTING GOD – is like closing your fist. You can't receive the wisdom skills for obedient living!

- DOUBT James describes as DOUBLE-MINDEDNESS.

= "OK God, you'll give me what I need to grow through this ... but where else should I look to survive?" = 2 minds

Double-mindedness is being CURIOUS about God's wisdom on the one hand, but then not being committed to it if it's inconvenient.

Because Jesus fulfilled all obedience, God is FOR you.

Jesus has taken away my reproach before God – nothing stands in the way of His generosity FOR ME! True faith believes that.

V. CONCLUSION

To what degree does that faith live in you as your deal with YOUR TRIALS today?

- Counting them pure joy
- Persevering unto maturity
- Asking & trusting for wisdom

Joni Eareckson Tada, as most of you know, was paralyzed from the neck down in a diving accident when she was 17. Years later, here's what her PERSEVERING FAITH could write:

God engineered the circumstances. He used them to prove Himself, as well as MY loyalty. Not everyone had this privilege. I felt there were only a few people God cared for in such a special way that He would trust them with this kind of experience. This understanding left me relaxed and comfortable as I relied on His love, exercising new learned trust. I saw that my injury was not a tragedy but a gift God was using to help me conform to the image of Christ, something that would mean my ultimate satisfaction, happiness – even joy.

THAT'S God's wisdom. That's true faith. That's Christ in her. AMEN!

Hebrews 12:2 – *Let's fix our eyes on Jesus, the author & perfecter of our faith, who FOR THE JOY SET BEFORE HIM endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*