

James - There is Joy in My Trial

Sign Title: There is Joy in My Trial

March 13, 2011

Good morning in the name of Christ. If you are new, my name is Kurt and I am one of the pastors. We are thankful you can join us this morning at Faith Church. You came at a great time because today we begin a new teaching series in the book of James. The series will last approximately 27 weeks. I divided it into four mini-series. The first mini-series called “Trials and Temptations” will cover the first 18 verses of the book. I think you will find this mini-series very practical because we wrestle with trials and temptations every day of our life.

As a book, James is a little different from other New Testament letters because it doesn't feel as orderly and structured. It feels more like a music video than a structured letter because it jumps from one subject to another. For all you linear thinkers, myself included, you will find James hard to outline.

Before we begin our study, we need some background on this book. Turn to the book of James in your Bibles. It is page 1011 if you are using the pew Bibles.

Background

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

Who is this James? It is not Jesse James, he comes much later in history. In the New Testament, there are four James':

- James, the son of Zebedee, brother of the Apostle John (Matthew 4:21)
- James, the son of Alphaeus, also known as James the Younger (Luke 6:15, Mark 15:40)
- James, the father of Judas (Luke 6:16)

- James, the half-brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55)

Without getting into the lengthy explanations, you simply need to know that most scholars believe the author of James is James, the half-brother of Jesus. Maybe you didn't realize that after the virgin birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph went on to have at least six other children. Jesus' four brothers are named in Matthew 13:55 and verse 56 of that chapter says he had sisters. These, of course, were only half-brothers and sister through Mary as Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, not by Joseph. It is interesting to think of Jesus as one kid among *at least* seven kids in the family. Jesus was the oldest and, of course, the oldest is always perfect.

Younger brother James didn't always believe Jesus was Christ, the Messiah. In fact, John 7:5 tells us that even Jesus' brothers didn't believe his claims to be the Messiah. My experience is members of your own family are the hardest to lead to trust in Jesus as their savior. It was no different in Jesus' home. Apparently his brothers wouldn't believe his claims to be the Messiah, even after seeing the miracles.

What changed their mind? For James, we know it was one solid piece of evidence that he could not refute,... the resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15:7 says the resurrected Jesus appeared to James. That led to a complete 180 degree turn in his life. He became a passionate follower of Jesus. He eventually became the leader of the church in Jerusalem and even chaired the Council in Jerusalem talked about in Acts 15. He was so convinced his half-brother Jesus was God in

the flesh who rose from the dead that in 62 A.D., James died a martyrs death because of it.

The historian Eusebius records

James “used to enter alone into the temple and be found kneeling and praying for the forgiveness of the people, so that his knees grew hard like a camel’s because of his constant worship of God, kneeling and asking forgiveness for the people. So from his excessive righteousness he was called the Just.”

That is a serious turn around. This morning, are you like James? Would you need irrefutable evidence to believe in Jesus? If so, James is your man.

What I find so amazing is that James was no name dropper. You would expect him to try to impress his audience with his credentials.

James, from the sacred womb of Mary, congenital sibling of the Christ. The brother and confidant of the Jesus, the Messiah.”

That is not how he begins his letter. He simply says, “James, a servant of Jesus Christ.” The word for servant in the Greek literally means *slave*. Why do you think he skips the impressive titles and call himself a lowly slave of Jesus?

We live in a name-dropping society where people try to make themselves look better by associating themselves with people of importance.

Remember when Sarah Palin came to town? People were excited to shake her hand and have her to sign their book. Pretend she had a brother in Spirit Lake. Can you imagine the media notoriety he would receive. It would be instant celebrity status everywhere he went! James had that kind of status! Why would he refrain from using it?

The more I thought about this, the more I realize he wasn't refraining from using his credentials. He was using the most impressive credentials of all. It doesn't matter what letters we can put before or after our name. It doesn't matter what family he grew up in. The greatest identity is that James gets to be a servant of Jesus. That is the one credential that matters.

The highest credential anyone can have is to be a servant of Jesus.

My first challenge is change the way you sign your letters this week. Sign them, "servant of Jesus"... not chief product manager, not CEO, not Product Specialist, but servant of Jesus, what a privileged and high calling we have.

Friends, the rest of the book of James simply answers one question. What does it look like to live out the high calling of being a servant Jesus in everyday life?

He addresses it to the twelve tribes in the dispersion. Dispersion means scattering. Let's place this book in its context. Acts 8 talks about how Jewish Christians were persecuted after the stoning of Stephen in Jerusalem. At this time, Judaism was a protected religion in the Roman Empire. If you weren't a Jew, you were expected to worship the other God's in the constellation of Roman deities. Jewish Christians were kicked out of the synagogue in Jerusalem. As Stephen's stoning shows us, being a Jewish Christian in Jerusalem was a death wish. To survive, many Jewish Christians fled to places around the ancient world but, even there they didn't fit into society. They couldn't go to the synagogues and hang with the Jews and fall under the protected status of Judaism and they couldn't worship the constellation of other false Gods everyone else worshipped

around them. So they didn't fit in society. Life was really tough. They struggled financially, relationally and in business with others.

James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, writes this letter to the Jewish Christians scattered around the ancient world to tell them what it looks like to live as a servant of Jesus, when life is really tough.

That is the question the books of James answers. That is the question we all need answered today. What does it look like to follow Christ when life is really tough today.

James 1:2-4

James begins by sounding like pastor whacko as he tells them, and us, that we need to look at life from a completely different perspective when it falls apart around us.

How can I have joy in a trial?

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, James 1:2 (ESV)

This sounds pretty irrational. If there is one thing I can count on, when someone loses their job or a loved one dies or a family member is diagnosed with cancer, I don't see a lot of joy. Yet, here is James, speaking under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, saying that if we really understood our trials from God's perspective, we would choose to see joy in them. If there is any joy to be found in trials, we want to discover it because with the naked eye, we don't see any. Let's break this down.

Trials

What is James talking about. Let me begin with the word *Trials* and tell you what he does not mean.

These trials are not sufferings we face as a consequence of our choices.

Every difficulty we face is not a trial. Most people blame all their difficulties in life on God and we don't like to accept responsibility for our own choices. Abuse your bodies, your health with deteriorate. Abuse those around you and your relationships will deteriorate. Speed down the road, get a ticket. This is important. When we suffer as the consequence of our own choices, don't find joy in it. Accept responsibility for sin, get on your knees and repent and ask for God's forgiveness. Don't blame God.

**But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.
1 Peter 4:15 (ESV)**

This is NOT the trials James is talking about.

These trials are not suffering when God disciplines us for our sin.

Another type of suffering James is not talking about is God's discipline.

**Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word. Psalm 119:67
(ESV)**

Hebrews 12:3-17

God sometimes allows suffering in our lives to discipline and correct us. Folks, have secret, conscious sins they carry for years. They are dark sides of our lives we want nobody to know about. For many guys it is internet porn. For many women it is emotional fantasies about a relationship that should never take place. If that stuff persists, out of love, God will discipline us to break us from our

sin. He does not punish us for our sin. If you have trusted Christ, Christ already took the punishment for our sin, but, like a good father, God won't allow us to stay addicted to our sin but will discipline us to break us from it. When God disciplines us, it is often very painful because he means it to be very effective. God's discipline on our lives is not what James is talking about. If God is disciplining us the response is to repent and change.

James is talking about trials God allows into our life to grow our faith and give him glory.

Various Trials

While he is talking about those kind of trials, those kinds of trials come in many forms. He says to see joy in the trials of *various kinds*. The word various literally means varieties. He says, "I don't care what variety of trial you are going through." It may be physical because you have lost your health, it may be emotional because you are depressed, it may be relational because you lost someone you deeply love, it may be financial because you lost your job and sense of self worth. These are all trials where we can *count it all joy*.

Count

The word *count*, is sometimes translated as *consider* in other translations. Both are good translations because James is saying the joy we are to have in the trials we face is not an emotional feeling like we are a contestants on the Price-Is-Right television show. This joy is a work of the mind.

It is like putting money in your saving account. It isn't fun to live on less and not have all the money we want for partying on the weekend. Money may be available but we put the money in bank because in our mind, we can see the

greater joy when it comes time to pull some of your savings out to buy a car or a house. So even though it isn't fun to live on less right now, your mind can see past the immediate day to day discomfort of peanut butter and wheat bread sandwiches because you can see the greater joy of not going into debt to buy everything.

Now I know this sounds strange. You are saying, OK Kurt, when the bottom drops out on my life, no matter what it is that I am facing, even though my emotional world is in complete turmoil, I am to use my mind to peer through the storm I am in the middle of because there is something on the other side of the storm that I can look forward to that is really good. So while I am in the storm, it hurts, but I can count it all joy because I know God's intent is to bring about something great when I get through it.

Why does James say this? James tells us trials in the life of a Christian set in motion a very special process that God uses in us.

Trials ➡ Testing ➡ Steadfastness ➡ Completeness + Maturity

Trials are the way God makes us mature.

Trials bring about testing.

for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. James 1:3 (ESV)

The Greek word for testing is very important here. It means to *determine the genuineness of something by actual use*. It is a little like running a drug test. You have a pile of pills from a doctor and who knows if they will actually help you get better like the doctor says they will. To see if they really work and it isn't just

a bunch of doctor psycho babble, a test group of people are given the real medicine and another test group is given a sugar pill. Do the sick people actually get better on the medicine or not? The medical company puts on their packaging, "Tested in clinical trial" We know this stuff actually works.

This is what James is saying. When the bottom our lives falls out, our faith is put to the test in a clinical trial. God are you really there? We will find out when the bottom falls out. Does he hold us together during the difficult times? We will find out when life gets tough. Does he provide strength to get us through the long nights of pain? There is only one way to know for sure. Does he provide the money we need so there is still food on our table? Only those who have lost their job can tell you if he does. Does God really love us? There is only one way for us to find out if God's love is real, test it!

That is the good thing the trial brings. It brings us the story about how when we didn't know how to pay our taxes, the check showed up in the mail box. It brings you the story about how we could not imagine getting through the loss of someone we love but now we know that God's shoulders are actually the best place to cry.

Testing produces steadfastness.

for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. James 1:3 (ESV)

This testing of our faith not only shows us our faith is real but it produces steadfastness. In the Greek, this is the word *hupomeno*. We have talked about this word in the past. It literally means, *the ability to remain under pressure*. It is the ability to remain faithful to Christ in spite of the adversity and temptation we

face. The book of Hebrews talks about this frequently because it described the Christian life as a marathon. It is a long obedience in the same direction.

It always amazes me watching the students on the cross country team. They run the cross country course much faster than I could. How do they get there? They train. Their limits are tested every day in practice so they can run a little further and faster each day. It is this daily testing that gives them the ability to remain under the pain and pressure of a race much longer than I can.

Why does God allow trials into our life? First, the trials demonstrate to us that God is real when we are forced to lean on his arms for what we need to make it through. Second, it is during those trials that God grows our faith in him. He gives us stories to tell and memories to live on that show us God really does provide. Like a marathon runner, our ability to remain under pressure gets better the more trials train us.

Where is this going?

Steadfastness produces perfection and completeness

God's goal for our life is not our momentary happiness. God's goal for our life is Christ-like maturity. He gets us there by putting us through trials. There is no way to become mature in Christ other than the rocky road. All happiness makes bratty spoiled children. God says it is the same way with us, his children. If God didn't allow trials into our lives, we would never grow up in him. We pray for trouble-free lives. God says, "Why would I do that for you? I love you too much to leave you as immature kids."

More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, Romans 5:3 (ESV)

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:6–7 (ESV)

So let's put this together.

Live with God's goals in mind.

Most of us miss this. We think God's plan is that we trust Christ as our savior and he is done. It is trust Christ as your savior and that is only the beginning. God's goal is to mature us so our character becomes more and more like Christ. He does that through all kinds of trials. God's goal for our life is not our happiness, it is Christ-like holiness. Say it with me, "God's goal for my life is not my happiness, it is my Christ-like holiness."

If I think the goal of my life is happiness, I will be really upset when God allows trials and suffering into my life. I will start to think God doesn't love me or he is punishing me. When in reality God loves us so much that he is growing us. I like the way Warren Wiersbe says this.

Our values determine our evaluations. If we value comfort more than character, then trials will upset us. If we value the material and physical more than the spiritual, we will not be able to 'count it all joy!' if we live only for the present and forget the future, the trials will make us bitter, not better (Wiersbe)

We have all seen people respond to trials by becoming bitter, angry and resentful toward God. You and I can name people who have held grudges against God for years. Maybe you are that person. In saying that, I am not minimizing the darkness or pain you may have experienced. I know what many of you go through. Every week the calls come in to the office and I hear the

heart-ache and pain many of you are walking through. I am not minimizing any of that.

James is saying there is joy in trials that the rest of the world knows nothing about. All the world has is its health, and wealth so when people get cancer, when the stock market crashes, when grain prices fall through the floor, their lives fall apart.

No so for us because of Jesus. When we are in a trial, while it is emotionally difficult, in our mind we can see through the storm and we know God promises to use it to grow us up and teach us that he can be trusted.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28 (ESV)

I am not saying that when we go through tragedies we don't weep in the middle of them. A husband shouldn't come home to his wife and say, "Hey, honey, my PSA number came back high, I have cancer." She responds with, "That is great honey, I am so happy for you!"

I am also not saying that we have any right to take it upon ourselves to bring trials into other peoples lives because we think they need to grow a little spiritually. I don't want to hear that you keyed your friends car in the church parking lot because you felt they needed a little spiritual growth.

Trials are serious business in the Christian life. Many of them are very painful. But God allows them into our lives because he loves us and he promises to use them for our good, to make us mature and complete so our character becomes more and more like Christ's in this world.

Conclusion

I think the best model of what it means to hold on to this truth during difficult times is Jesus. Do you remember this verse from our study in Hebrews?

...Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)

Jesus made it through the suffering, shame and agony of the cross because he kept his mind fixed on the joy on the other side. The joy of sitting at the right hand of the throne of God having fulfilled God's will for His life and achieved the salvation for our sin. That is how he made it through.

What trial are you in today? Maybe you came here angry at God for allowing difficulty into your life. Now you know the truth. God allows difficulties into our lives to mature us.

When we leave, I want you to leave with a different way of looking at life. Rather than looking at trials through the eyes of your heart, and what we feel is happening when life falls apart, look at trials through the eyes of your mind, and what we know is true about how God promises to use them for our good, and his glory.



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