

Nov. 17, 2013

Maturing in Christ Through Trials and Prayer

James 1:1-8,12

We will be starting a new sermon series from the book of James this morning. It is my favorite book in the New Testament. It talks about many practical things that we can relate to in our Christian life. Things, that if we do not build our foundation on the reality of Christ and who we are in Christ, we can make some very bad decisions in our life.

You may have noticed that I have had you to stand at the beginning of the service as I read the key scriptures for the message in the past few weeks. I am hoping that when we stand and read from the Word that you understand that something important is being read. Ponder for a moment that if we truly believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, as I am sure that all you do who are here this morning, how amazing is it that you can be sitting here this morning and realize that you are actually hearing God speak to you. If you had the opportunity to sit behind a curtain and have God, the creator of the heavens and earth, speak directly to you, how intently would you listen? Well, think about that as we stand and read from the scripture this morning, because that is exactly what is happening. We are hearing the inspired Word of God.

All Stand and Read Scripture

James 1:1-8, 12.

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

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

To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.

² Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

⁵ But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven

and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

¹² Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.

Prayer

INTRODUCTION:

James, writing in the power of the Holy Spirit, constantly calls us to decide if our faith and hope is truly in the Lord Jesus Christ. Are we going to trust Him and obey Him and believe that He is going to come through and do as He has promised or we going to trust in ourselves and our resources and try to do things on our own?

James is giving us this wisdom out of love, because, anything else that we put our hope and trust in will ultimately fail. In Christ, even if we die, we live. Isn't that a great promise? If we are in Christ when we die, we live with Christ for eternity. Without Christ, we just die, and there is an eternal separation from God.

James in verse 1, describes himself as a bondservant of "God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." This is fascinating because, the common consensus is that this James is the half-brother of Jesus. We know from the scriptures that Mary and Joseph had other sons and daughters after Mary's virgin birth of Christ.

Mark 6:3

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?"

From Gal. 1:19 we know that he was an apostle "But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother." He was not one of the original twelve apostles, but he is described as an apostle by Paul.

It is also interesting that in John 7:5, it states that Jesus' half brothers and half sisters did not initially believe in Him.

In **Galatians 2:9** we read that he was a pillar of the Church in Jerusalem.

I Cor. 15:7 it states that Christ appeared to James and then to the rest of the apostles. So Paul also confirms that James was an apostle.

We would consider this to be a very high position. Imagine being an apostle and a half brother of Jesus. He could have used that pedigree to impress people. Notice that James did not appeal to any of that. He described himself as **a bondservant of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the most significant identity that you can have, being a bondservant to Christ.**

Consider this: We are all bondservants of Satan and sin until we become bondservants to Christ. Who would you rather be a bondservant to? Well, I hope to Christ. He is a great Master; a loving Master. He is a Master with lots of good plans for you. Satan just tries to kill and destroy. **If you are going to be a bondservant to somebody, it is much better to be a bondservant of Christ and James gladly identifies himself as that.**

According to Josephus, James died as a martyr in 62 AD. This may be the oldest book in the New Testament. It is believed that it was written between 44 and 49 AD. Notice that Gentiles were not mentioned in this book. He wrote **"to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad."** which would be the Jews. This is pretty much what Christianity was at this point. There wasn't much inclusion of Gentiles during this period. They were called **"scattered"** because they had dispersed outside of Jerusalem due to persecution. Since they were spread out, this becomes the means by which the Gentiles were introduced to Christianity.

This was written to a group of persecuted people who were scattered and had lost a lot. The losses were important to them, but now they have Christ, which is more important.

BODY:

So he starts in verse 2 with the following encouragement:

I. Patience Through Tribulation.

James 1:2-4.

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

² Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Remember Romans 8:28? "All things work together for good for those who love God". And what was the good that was promised? "That we would be conformed to the image of His Son". We would become more like Christ. Well, here it is again.

James is talking about your trials. He is talking about my trials. He is not talking about a specific trial, but ALL trials that occur in our lives. He promises us "that the testing of your faith produces endurance (or PATIENCE). ⁴ And let PATIENCE have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Do trials feel good? NO! There is a reason that we do not call them blessings. We identify blessings as something that feels good. We call hardships trials, because that are not comfortable to go through. But yet he tells us to rejoice in our trials, because he knows that it not our human nature to understand that trials are a good thing for a Christian. We consider a trial as a BAD thing, but James wants us to understand God uses trials in our lives as a GOOD thing. He is calling on us to understand trials from God's perspective. We have to "cross the line" with our faith and say that even though this is not how I would normally think about trials **from my worldly view**, I must embrace the trials in the way that God says to think of them. We must believe that God is completely **in control** of the trial. Everything that happens will not be good as we consider good. God can take what we want to consider bad and turn it around to build our **patience**.

It is going to be like an **exercise** for our faith.

It is going make us **more mature**.

It is going to **strengthen our faith**.

As Romans 8:29 promises, it will **conform** us to be **more like Christ**.

The "**Complete and Perfect**" part probably doesn't fully come until we die and go to be with the Lord, but we strive to **grow in our faith and become stronger** every day. One day we will be complete and perfect and trials will no longer be necessary.

Trials are part of God's sovereign plan. We must decide if we believe that trials can be good or if we are going to try to resolve them on our own.

A. We can believe that trials happen naturally and God has no control over the trial or He has taken a hands off approach and we are at the mercy of chance of the devil, other people, or my lack of knowledge.

You know, there is no long term hope in that. If God does not have control, we **should be** having anxiety over them. But, God IS in control.

B. We might think that the trial is a punishment for something that we have done. I have got to put in my time until the punishment is over.

C. Or you may consider that “I am just going to **“DO GOOD”** my way out of it. If I do this much good, then God will get me out.

ILLUSTRATION:

We do suffer temporary consequences when we do wrong.

If I get caught speeding, I will probably have to pay a speeding ticket.

If I get caught stealing, I may end up in jail.

We suffer consequences for our sins.

But...We are never PUNISHED for our sins as Christians, because our sins are covered by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ when we repent of our sins.

There is no debt to pay!

We do not have any GOOD to give back to God other than the GOOD that He already given to us through His Holy Spirit.

If we do not accept God’s sovereign plan for us and cannot trust that somehow He will cause our trials to be for GOOD, we will find ourselves **sidelined from JOY**. I can’t have joy until this trial ends. I cannot be a part of God’s plans and purposes until I get out of this trial. So we really do miss joy because of our improper thinking.

Once we begin to believe that

God IS in control

That He loves US

That He sent His Son for US

That he can do GOOD through the trial

Once we understand trials properly, we can have joy during trials because we can trust and depend on Him.

II. Wisdom Through Prayer.

Now that we know and accept what God’s Word says how we should handle our trials. What do we need to know to get through the trials?

James 1:5.

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

⁵ But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

God is not obligated to tell us why a trial is happening. It may be from our own doing, or it may not be. He has promised that we can get wisdom and guidance to get us through. If we ask God for wisdom, He is not going to say, “What, after what you did, you want me to help you?” God is not like that. He does not give us wisdom and goodness for our self at all. He gives us wisdom and goodness for Christ’s sake.

Romans 3:10-12

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁰ “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;
¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;
¹² ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;
THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”

BUT:

James 1:6-8.

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

⁶ But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ *being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

You will get no help from God if He is your “Plan B”. You must either believe that you need to have God’s wisdom or you don’t.

The knowledge of ignorance is the beginning of knowledge.

If each of us would think of things going on in our lives, all of us could come up with a trial that is happening. It may be small or it could be huge.

It could be a **business failure**,
it could be a **death of a loved one**,
maybe you have been **diagnosed with some difficult illness**,
maybe you have a **real estate problem**,
maybe you a **personal problem** between you and someone else.

You know it is a trial because it hurts. Will you take that trial and accept that God will help you through it if you just ask for wisdom believing that He is capable of providing that help.

A trial can bring us closer to God. James is not suggesting that we have joy in the trial for the trial's sake, but that we come to know that the God that we are putting trust in is 100% powerful. He is perfectly wise and he will give you that wisdom. He loves you! He will give you this wisdom every time without fail, if we put our faith in God.

Don't waste your time on "flesh pleasing" worldly advice. True wisdom comes from God's Word. Accept His advice.

2 Timothy 3:14-17

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁴ You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

God will use this experience to conform us to the image of Christ.

As we become more like Christ:

We will humble ourselves more fully to God.

We will accept Jesus in our lives as our **true** Lord and Savior.

We will ask the Lord to "Make me a bondservant for Him".

We will patiently listen for God's direction in our lives.

We put our trust in Him. Ask for His wisdom and believe that He will give it to you. Outside of Christ there is no salvation.

FINAL ENCOURAGEMENT:

If you have a trial in your life and you already know what God wants you to do about it from your knowledge of God's Word, I encourage

you to act on it now. Don't leave and think I have got to think about it some more. Trust in God's sovereignty and wisdom.

If you do not know the how to handle the problem based on your knowledge of God's Word. Keep asking, seeking, believing, and trusting in the Lord. God says He will give you the wisdom. This may require that you spend some time in God's Word or that you discuss it with fellow Christians.

Put your faith in Christ for your salvation and obey His commands. Become His bondservant. Seek His wisdom. We start that journey by following what Peter preached on the day of Pentecost.

Acts 2:36-42

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³⁶ Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”

³⁷ Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” ³⁸ Peter *said* to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”

⁴⁰ And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!” ⁴¹ So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

⁴² They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

There will be a congregational vote next week to accept me as your minister. I would also like to start a Bible study. Consider what would be a good time.

The Family of God

I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God.
I've been washed in the fountain, cleansed by His blood!
Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod,
For I'm part of the family, the family of God.