

Profiting from life's trials

James 1

And so we are going to study this text under the heading 'Profiting from life's trials'

The World's view of happiness is something in these lines;

- Healthy
- Wealthy
- Successful

In a word 'materialistic'. God has no part to play in the world's view of happiness. In fact, the opposite is true. The world sees God as the ultimate cosmic kill joy, spoilsport if you like.

How can a good God bring trials to those He claim to love and ask them to be happy? That is far from happiness if you ask the common Joe.

In the absence of earthly pleasures, happiness is elusive to the worldly.

But what about the Christian? How do we respond to trials? Are we to loose all hope, despair? Just become miserable?

Of course the answer is a resounding NO.

James, in our text this evening calls us to rejoice in trials. Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, he tells us.

Four sub headings to help us hang our thoughts.

1. Rejoicing in Trials

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

In the words Job: Man is born to trouble, As the sparks fly upward.

Trials are guaranteed to a Christian. They are not a sign that God has forsaken us, but a reason to rejoice that God who is sovereign has allowed such a test to come upon us. And we know that God cannot test us beyond what we can bear, but that even in our tests He grants grace.

Peter in his letter to Christians scattered in Asia said; Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

I know how you feel, that this is easier said than done. And I grant you that.

They cannot be trials if they don't have a measure of pain, whether physical or emotional.

But you see;

The joy, the bliss in view here is not one that is concocted by the flesh but one that is founded on the truth of the Word of God. He is sovereign over everyone and everything forever, He is in control over the current state of affairs, hence whatever trials or tests we face, our focus is not here and now but the future.

Paul in his letter to the Romans put it this way; For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

The Holy Spirit helps us to rejoice in times of trial, consider Paul and Silas in prison They praised God, they sang hymns. That's not a sign of people who are sad but of those who are full of the joy of the Holy Spirit.

Peter and the other apostles after being imprisoned and frogged rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ; Acts 5 :41 and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

Yes, we are humans and we tend to panic in times of trouble, but a reminder that our escape can only be found in Christ, Only in Him can we find peace and joy.

But also having this confidence; Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. And so no matter the trial, we can rejoice that God is working His purposes out for our good.

Our second sub-heading

2. The purpose of trials

Verse 3 and 4 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James now calls these trials 'the testing of your faith'. So we see that God allows these tests to build us up, to strengthen us in our faith. It was so with the saints of old, it has been through the ages, it is the same now and in the future if Jesus Christ tarries.

One of the purposes of trials is to build us up from glory to glory.

Paul again in Romans 5 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

And so trials in a sense harden us so that we are no longer spiritual babes but mature able to eat solid food as the writer of Hebrews put; But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

The second purpose of trials is to remind us that we don't belong. This is not home. And we can tend to get too comfortable.

But we are as Peter says pilgrims, passers-by, our home is in heaven. We should not get too attached to this world that we get caught up in materialism and the spirit of the age. And trials have an uncanny way of refocusing our minds to God. We are reminded that we don't belong here.

Paul to the Philippians said; For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

The writer Hebrews writing about the fathers of faith; These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

Friends in heaven, there is no work, there is no suffering. The work and the suffering for the name of our Lord is here and now. And if we stand and are unshaken, we identify ourselves with Him.

\let me read from Hebrews 12 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The last purpose of trials is to separate wheat and tares. In His parable of the sower our Lord said this regarding the seed that fell on stony ground; But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

We have those in the church who have selective hearing and come because of the ill-conceived premise that God will give them heaven and the best of this world but overlook the call to bear one's cross. In the words of our Lord; "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me". And that is to say, we must be willing to die for our faith in Christ.

And so with such people, when the honeymoon period is over as it were, they cannot bear it. I didn't sign up for this they say.

3. Seeking Guidance in Trials

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

The wisdom that is in view here is understanding the purpose of any trial. For trials are for our learning, and so it follows that whatever lesson is intended we should embrace it. How then do we seek this wisdom? James tells us that we should ask of God who gives generously without finding fault. Prayer then is very essential in trials because here we find the answers that we seek.

Note that the reason for praying during trials is not necessarily for it to be taken away but that the lessons may be learnt. Let me quote Paul in 2Cor 12

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I

pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

We have confidence that God will hear our petitions and will answer according to His will. He will not leave us in darkness. 1 John 5:14 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

And so we should always seek His guidance during trials.

Our fourth and final sub-heading and briefly.

4. Trusting God in Trials

But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. 8 Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

We come to God and to His word in faithful trust. Not wavering but in the knowledge that God cannot lie nor can anyone or anything thwart His plans. He is forever faithful and to doubt that is a sin in the sight of God.

Proverbs 3:5 commands us to; Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

Now in one sense, we all are tempted with doubt but it only become a sin if we fall to the temptation. Throughout scripture we are exhorted time and again to trust In God and His word.

Jehoshaphat said to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful."

In the absence of the Bible the Prophets were entrusted with the word of God. They heard directly from God and conveyed that message to the people. Of course, today we have the Bible.

Hebrews 11 the chapter of faith says And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

To understand trials we have to trust God and trust His word.

Trials can come in different guises. This virus bringing the world to a stand still for example, how are you coping with it? Do you perhaps feel like God has lost control?

Now of course it's good to be careful, we shouldn't test God by deliberately exposing ourselves to danger.

But what we shouldn't do is let fear overtake us. God and He alone has decided when we exit this world, not a minute sooner or later.

Let me finish by reading our final Grace Hymns 753