

Count it all Joy  
James 1:1-8

Daniel 3: 9-30  
Romans 8 18-31

Last week we worked on setting up the ground work for this book, and while there is controversy over the Authorship of this book we concluded that the majority of the evidence points to James the Brother of Jesus. This week I picked up Douglas Moo's commentary on James and in his 46 page introduction he goes into much detail more detail into the authorship but ultimately falls out on the side of Jesus brother being the James who wrote this book.

Unlike many of the other books written in the new testament, James did not write this book to one specific church or person but he did write it to a specific group of people. He says to the 12 tribes that are scattered abroad. One way that this could be seen is that James is acknowledging the believers, or true the Israel. Not so much national Israel but the Israel of God, those who have been called and adopted into God's family, so not necessarily specifically Jews, but rather all of God's Children who have been scattered, who are displaced, and do not have a land to call home. Even though this could be understood this way, it is likely addressed mainly to Jewish Christians who previously were a part of the Jerusalem Church. During the time of the writing of James, Christians in Palestine were under economic persecution, much of the middle east was in a famine and many wealthy people would buy up land and force farmers to work on their own terms. This book is believed to have been written to these people who have left Palestine fleeing this persecution and being scattered abroad into various other lands.

James being one of the leaders of the Church in Jerusalem was more then likely at one time the pastor of these people who had left and he likely wrote this letter to them to both encourage and admonish them as they seek to make a new life. As we mentioned last week, with the dating of this book it is believed to have been around the mid ad 40s which would also fit well with this historical event of the Jewish Christians fleeing Palestine. If you remember last week we said that this book was probably written before the Apostolic Council that was recorded in Acts 15. It would seem by the writing in this book that James was aware of Paul's teaching and emphasis on justification by faith alone but he may not have fully understood at this time by what Paul meant by this doctrine.

As we saw in Acts 15, which is the account that Paul mentions in Galatians, that upon meeting, and discussing they are in agreement as to doctrine. Paul said in Galatians chapter 2 when recounting this event, he said that those who were pillars, Peter, James and John in the church of Jerusalem added nothing to him. They fully accepted his teaching, and his doctrine and extended the right hand of fellowship as a brother in Christ. This shows that there is contradiction between what James and Paul teaches as some have come to believe but rather the stance that James takes in this letter is likely because he had yet to meet Paul and was reacting to what he was hearing about those who had fled Jerusalem and were more then likely gathering with people who had been influenced by Paul's teaching. It was probably actually a distortion of Paul's teaching that James was reacting too. James may have not actually even been aware that it Paul's teaching that was the jumping point of what he was opposing.

Apparently there was a faction in the churches who had perverted Paul's teaching using the slogan justification by faith alone as an excuse for neglecting practical Christian living. It is not hard to

believe that this would be the case for it surely is the case today as we look at the lives of those who claim Christ, but have no fruit of the spirit as Paul would say. Also it serves as a challenge to those of us who are children of God but have become complacent in our walk. Douglas Moo wrote about his study in James, he said

“I remain convinced that the heart of this letter is a call to wholehearted commitment to Christ. James's call for our consistent and uncompromising Christian living is much needed. Our churches are filled with believers who are only half hearted in their faith and, as a result, leave large areas of their lives virtually untouched by genuine Christian Values. Nor am I immune to such problems myself. As I have quite unexpectedly find myself in my “middle age” yeas, I have discovered a tendency to back off of my fervor for the Lord and his work. My re immersion in James has challenged me sharply at this point and I pray that it might have the same effect on you. “

This book is very relevant for the church today. It seems that there is a general idea that all one needs to do is believe in God. It really doesn't matter what you do with your life, or how you live just as long as you have faith. What we see today is very much I think what James saw, a perversion of the doctrine of Justification by faith Alone. Our churches are full of people who claim a belief in Christ, yet do not live a life showing such. Today's trend of liberalization, of tolerance of sin, of gossiping, back stabbing, dishonesty, and deception that we see springing up in our churches today show our need for this book. This is a very practical book, with very practical implications on our Christian walk.

James is not a book that is heavy on theological arguments such as we see with the likes of Paul's writing, but that being said it is full of theology through out but it is presented in a way more like that of a pastor encouraging and exhorting his flock then putting forth theological debate and argument. James is often times classified as a Wisdom book much like the book of proverbs because he covers a lot of ground quickly and just as in the book of proverbs, James ties wisdom to behavior. People with the wrong kind of wisdom are contentious and practice evil but those who have divine wisdom are humble and seek to perform good deeds.

So it is in this light that we see James. A letter written to those who have fled persecution in Jerusalem, and now find themselves among strangers and trying to build a new life and are threatened to be leaving off some of that which they have been taught. So We can see why James would start off this letter in the way that he did, jumping right into dealing with persecution and trials. He says in verse 2.

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. James is reminding his readers that God allows difficulties to arise in the life of believers for a purpose and that purpose is accomplished through a correct response to our problems. I am sure these Jewish Christians were asking the same question that gets asked a lot today. “Why does God allow bad things happen to good people.” Or to word it a bit better, why do the righteous suffer?

It is a difficult question to answer, and James does not offer a complete answer but it is clear here that suffering does serve a purpose. He says that the testing of your faith produces patience, And let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Nothing drives us back to our Father like trials, or tests of faith. When something tragic happens in our life, or in the life of someone we love, as a believer the first thing that we should seek is the comfort of our father in heaven, the only one who can give us true peace and comfort. I think that is what James is saying here. Trials of faith, hard times, and persecution drive us to Christ. It produces in

us faith, we learn to have patience as we wait upon Christ to deliver us. Much like Paul said in Romans Chapter 5. Let's turn there Starting in verse 1.

Therefore, having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Even while we have trials, we can have peace,

Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, AND not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance, character, and character hope. 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.

This is why the righteous suffer...this is why bad things happen to good people. It is to produce patience, perseverance, character, and hope. It brings us to Christ, it breaks us down, it humbles us and reminds us that we need our savior! James says that patience will have its perfect work so that we may be perfect and complete. These various trials that we face in our life have an effect to mature us. They make us rely more on God and less on ourselves. Each trial we go through in our life we learn again and again that we must rely on God in all things. As we go through this life, and face these trials it draws us closer to Christ.

So understanding the reason that God allows us to have trials and tribulation is to bring us closer to him, which is how James can say that we should count it all Joy when we have them, because it is to make us stronger Christians. James is telling us to have patience, to wait on the Lord and to rejoice because the Lord will prevail, and deliver us from these trials. For as it says in Romans 8, All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. And not only that, he goes on to say For whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, we have been chosen, adopted by God for his purpose and Glory. And whom he predestined he also called, whom he called, these he also justified, and whom he justified, these he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

This is our hope in trials, in tribulations, during the difficult times of our lives. The God who predestined and called us as his children, The God who adopted us out of the mass of humanity to make us holy and set apart for his Glory will not abandon us. God did not die, so that you may live our life in hopeless suffering, he died so that through him we may be victorious in our trials, and in his death. This goes back to what we studied in Galatians about the doctrine of adoption, of Christ's death on the cross to pay the price of our sins so that we may be justified through him. Not of ourselves, or anything that we do but through Christ and his death, his burial, and his resurrection.

How glorious is this relationship we have with our Father. He sent his only Son to die in our place so that we may one day be joined with him in paradise for all of eternity. This is our hope! We should not be so introspective, so into our suffering that we forget what Christ has done. Looking back at Roman's 8, verse 35 Paul says Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? For your sake we are killed all the day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter, yet in all off these things we are more then conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is how we can be joyful when we are facing various trials, temptations, and persecution in our lives. We know that we are conquerors through Christ, and this too shall pass and our thoughts, and our concern should be on glorifying God through the trial for it is He who has the power to deliver us from it. I know that our sinful human nature gets in the way every time. I am guilty of it, when there is something going on in my life I tend to cry out to God saying.. “Why me? What have I done to deserve this?” but My focus is wrong, it is on myself, and my suffering where instead it should be on God's glory through this trial, it should not be asking What did I do to deserve this, but rather what would He have me learn from this.

If we can keep our mind and heart on Christ, it will change how we deal with the hardships that come our way. A good example of this, and someone who has had a big impact on me in this way is Josh and Jody Wood, while seeking God's will, preparing and planning to enter the mission field with every trial that would come their way, their mantra became “ It is better this way.” Even though difficulties would arise, seemingly impassable obstacles would pop up in their way, through it all they knew that God is sovereign over all, and all of these things were for their good, to refine them, to teach them, to prepare them for what God has in store for them.

I struggle with this, and I admit when faced with a difficult thing I can't always say as they do that it is better this way. Many times I ask those wrong questions..why me, how long must this go on, can't I just get passed this already?! But as James says, we should count it all joy, and we should not be impatient, but rather patiently wait on God, and learn that which he would have us to learn so that we may come out refined, and stronger in our faith then when we entered.

Another thing that trials do to the life of the Christian is that it proves their faith. A person who has Christ as their hope, will persevere in faith. A person who does not have saving faith will be crushed when trials and persecution arise. These are the ones that Jesus mentioned in his parable of the sower who's seed fell on the stony ground. They immediately sprang up but when the sun came they were scorched and burned up because they had no root. When their faith is tested, they may become angry with God. I have heard people say while going through hard times What good is it to believe in God if he allows this to happen! The fire of their trial ends up burning them completely, they become angry with God because he allowed them to suffer so. This is another effect that trials can have on us. Not only can it be a refining fire to burn off the excess, the waste and leave only the precious gold, but it also can be a proving fire, testing our faith as to whether it be true or not.

James continues saying that 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. It seems that James has jumped onto another subject here, but really it is still tied to the first. When we are going through trials, there is nothing better to ask for then for wisdom. While there is nothing wrong with asking for deliverance, and God's provision we should also be seeking wisdom not only in how to properly handle what we are suffering through, but also to learn what God would have us to learn.

James says that if we ask of God it will be given to us, liberally and without reproach. When God gives to us, he does not give so we may owe him later, he simply gives. Peter Davids in his commentary to James says it this way, God gives generously, which means that he gives without mental reservations, he simply gives, with a single heart. He is not looking for some hidden return from believers, he does not have mixed motives or grudging feelings in fact, he gives not just generously but without finding fault. That is, he does not complain about giving the gift, or the cost. God gives true gifts, no complaining, no criticizing, no mixed motives, no reluctance, free, generous and even spendthrift giving characterizes our God.

It is this God, who promises to grant us wisdom, and all that we need if we but ask it of him. But James tells us that we must ask in faith, with no doubting for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. I think that What James is talking about here, is not an emotional faith, he is not calling for us to bury our doubt and drum up an emotional feeling of certainty but rather to commit ourselves to God.

We trust and have faith in God, because God is God. We are to remain faithful despite our doubts. Just as Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego did when they told king Nebuchadnezzar that God was able to deliver them from the burning furnace, and if not let it be known that they still will not serve his gods nor worship the gold image. Or as Job said despite all that had happened to him, though God slay me, yet I will trust him.

This is the faith that James is talking about here. Even though we pray for deliverance from our trial, we cry out to God to take away the suffering but faith says that even if I were to die, to You oh God be the glory and the honor forever. It is a resting in God, despite the outcome knowing that whatever may befall you is for God's glory and purpose. Far too often we seek to escape our suffering, we seek healing from our sickness or disease, we seek to escape persecution we may be under, we want to be delivered how we want to be delivered from it. We cry out Why me God? But we should be like Job, we should be like Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego and cry out, whatever your will oh God, no matter the outcome I will serve you.

This should be our response, this should be our mindset, and this should be our cry. No matter what Trial, persecution, or tribulation comes our way, in times of sickness, health, poverty, or wealth, in matters of life or death to God be the glory! Count it all joy brethren when you fall into various trials, for it is an opportunity for God to be glorified, whether through your deliverance, or through your suffering to God be the glory!