

Faith that Endures.
James 1:9-17

Job 14:1-12
Mark 10:20-26

Last week we looked at the first 9 verses of James, and I think it never hurts to go through a little refresher since it flows right into what we are looking at this week. IF you remember from the introduction, this letter was addressed to the Jewish Christians who fled persecution and had left the Jerusalem Church. The persecution that they were suffering was largely economic, The area was going through a famine, jobs and food was scarce. It also didn't help that the church was more then likely comprised of mostly the poor. This probably had largely to do with the demographics of the church, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:26

“For you see your calling brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty: and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are.

The Jerusalem Church was no different, There were a few factors in play here, first there were many people who attended the Jerusalem Church who were Jews who traveled to Jerusalem and converted during Jewish festivals who opted to stay at the church instead of returning home where they was no church that could nurture them. Second there was a stream of visitors who would come to learn of Christianity from the source, to hear the teaching and learn from the Apostles. These people needed places to stay, and food to eat and relied on the hospitality of an already poor group of people. Lastly one of the contributors to the church having financial struggles is just as Paul said in Corinthians, not many wise, mighty and noble are called.

Christianity seems to appeal to those who are poor, people who are in need, and who are oppressed. It is not unlikely that the church had a large constituent of people that society looked down upon. We see throughout the bible how the gospel effected Prostitutes, tax collectors, and thieves, people who society despises but those who God calls to confound the wise. This is more then likely what we would find in the churches in Jerusalem, the poor, the oppressed, not the powerful and mighty. Christians were a despised group of people in Jerusalem. The Jews hated them, and always saw them as a threat to their faith. Because of this Christians were likely the first ones who would loose their jobs, or the last to be hired.

To get a better handle on what was going on here in the early church and the pressure these Christians were facing we can see in history that at this time Herod Agrippa the First had died, in AD 44 and was followed by a series of Procurators, or leaders. Out of this tumultuous time arose a group of Jewish Zealots who were seeking to liberate themselves from the power of Rome. They would target Roman's and Roman sympathizers, Kidnapping, robbery, and the like were very common. But even when caught, these Zealots were often released by the Pro-council by bribing them with the money they stole. The Pro-council was not seek the good of Rome, or the good of the people they ruled but it would seem were focused on increasing their own money and power.

As if the state in Israel wasn't bad enough the same type of corruption had found its way into the Jewish Temple system too, The high priestly families were not spiritual leaders, but rather economic powerhouses, they made themselves rich off of the poor. And used that money and power to bribe and influence the Roman Pro-council.

Jerusalem was made up of 5 economic groups or classes, you had slaves, then 2 groups of peasants. The ones who had land and the ones without. The ones without land would hire themselves out for a day to earn money to eat, but during famine and economic hardship there was not work to be found. Then there was the ones who owned land ,but when hard times came for them due to famine they were forced to sell their land off to the wealthy and then end up working on that land as sharecroppers, or hired hands. The 4th group was the merchants, who would travel in and sell their goods but Jerusalem was not a central hub for trade so many of them would travel outside of Jerusalem. Then lastly was the Jewish Priestly Clans, who were at the top of society, they held the power in Jerusalem and were the ones who would pay off the Pro-council to accomplish their desires. This is the environment that we find the Jerusalem church at the time that James was likely written. So it is no surprise that many of it's members would leave and seek to find a better life outside of Jerusalem. Peter David from his commentary he says

“James' church lived in the midst of this collapsing world, Although the church as a whole was growing and spreading across the world, believers felt oppressed. In their suffering their tendency was to imitate the world and try to gain power within the church. The Struggle for power produced internal factions, gossip and complaints. Since the church was economically insecure, church members tended to curry favor with the few wealthy members, to hold back on charitable giving, and to generally to look out for themselves. This is the situation that James is addressing with his letter designed to shake them out of their lethargy.

So knowing all that helps us to understand where James is coming from when he says in verse 9 Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation. I think this ties directly back to verse 2 when he says to Count it all Joy when you fall into various trials. A person who is trusting upon God no matter what his or her situation may be is able to look past their current circumstance. There is a duality in the life of God's adopted children. While on this earth we may be numbered in the community that Paul listed in Corinthians, that we read earlier. the poor, the simple, the weak, but wee are also heirs of God's promises. Turn with me to Mathew 5, starting in verse 3. Jesus is talking about this very thing.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

In this life we may not have much, but Christ said those who are humble and meek will inherit the kingdom of heaven. Everything the world sees as power, or might, will all burn in the end and God's children will inherit the eternal kingdom of heaven.

It is this that James is telling us to glory in. This is is our exaltation that we should glory in. We should focus not on our earthly status or circumstances, but on our eternal status. Instead of focusing on

what we do not have, our minds should be on our salvation that Christ purchased for us by his own blood. We should not focus on our suffering, but rather keep our eyes on Christ and his victory over death, hell and the grave. This victory is yours, through Christ we can have victory over death, hell and the grave and live eternity in the presence of our Father in heaven.

While this is the state of everyone who believes upon God, Reversely James says in verse 10, The rich glory in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. The Rich love to take pride in all that they have. Their possessions, their economic position, when hard times arise instead of suffering they tend to be able to use it to their advantage. Just as we see happening in Jerusalem at this time, the rich buying up the poor land owners farm. Taking advantage of the suffering poor farmer to add to their own possessions and power. But all of this will end up being for their humiliation. The very thing that they see that gives them power, will be the very thing that condemns them.

Another way to look at this is that if the poor are to glory in their exaltation in Christ, the rich should glory in their humiliation before God. If a rich person is a child of God he would not count what he has as his own. He would freely give to the poor and needy knowing that his riches are like the flower of the field and will one day pass away. This is how the rich should glory in God, knowing that their money is not their own but has come from God and it should be used for God's glory. Sadly though, that is rarely the case for it seems that money and power has a corrupting effect and instead of seeking God's glory, it searches out it's own good, it's own glory and pride.

James says in verse 11, No sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass, its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits. In verse 10 I think James is telling us the response that the rich should have, what he should glory in, but follows it up quickly in the next verse telling us the outcome of the glory they do have. Just like the flower of the field passes away, or the grass withers so to will the rich mans possessions, power, and authority. Eventually they will be forgotten, their empire will crumble and their legacy, the glory they hoped that will last forever will fade.

Continuing on, in verse 12 James lists a beatitude, much like those we read earlier listed in Matthew. Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him. This connects back to verse 3 and 4. Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience, but let patience have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. Just as we said last week, James is talking about a person who has faith that endures the hardship and trial. The person who when persecution and hardship comes does not become angry at God, blaming God for their plight, but rather says as Job did...though the Lord slay me, I will serve him.

In verse 3 and 4 James says that testing creates patience, endurance, perseverance, and verse 12 follows up saying that this person who endures, has patience, and is blessed, that they are approved of God and will be given the reward at the end of the race...which is the crown of life. Eternal life in heaven with our Father. In this race there is not just one winner, but all who endure to the end will win for God has promised the crown of life to all those who love him. It is because of this that we can count ourselves blessed, despite our worldly circumstances, we know this, that our salvation is sure through the blood of Christ, and this life will fade like the flower, and wither like the grass but our saviors love and care for us endures forever.

We could easily see the other side of this as well, trials will cause our faith to grow, or it will cause it

to fail. As we said last week, one of the effect of trials is that it proves our faith. True saving faith will endure, a faith that we try to hold and build up within ourselves will fail when the trial becomes to difficult. This is the faith we see in verse 13. James says, Let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he himself tempt anyone. A person who's faith fails, will not want to take responsibility for their failure for it will ruin their image as a good christian.

They will start to make excuses, saying they failed because the trial God sent was more then they could bare. But What they really are doing is blaming God for their failure. In an attempt to save face, and keep their pride intact they blame the trial for their failure, and blame God for having them go through it. Israel did this many times, every time they face suffering they would blame God doubting his ability to help them. This is not the response of God's adopted children, they will persevere, they will endure until the end.

God does not tempt anyone, he does not send us temptation and trials to try to trip us up. A loving father does not set up his children to fail. So God who sent his son to die for you, will not temp, or try to trick you into failing. Many times the trials we face, or the temptation we have is because of ourselves. James says in verse 14, But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed then when desire has conceived it gives birth to sin, and sin when full grown brings for death.

Our internal response to our out word circumstances becomes a test of our faith. When we are tempted, do we coddle it? Do we play around with it a bit? Do we allow it as James says, to be conceived and birth sin? Paul says, how should we who are dead to sin live in it? This is of course a constant struggle in the heart and mind of the believer for while we may desire holiness, our flesh is weak and wars against the spirit. But God gives us the power to overcome the temptation, and our sin if we trust in him and focus our hearts and minds upon him.

James tells us in verse 16, to not be deceived brethren, God does not bring us evil, but he brings us good. He says that every good gift is from above and comes down from the father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. To put simply, God is good, and always does good things. God does no change, he is the same today as he was yesterday and he will be the same tomorrow. God does not give us gifts and then require them back tomorrow. He did not offer us the greatest gift, which is salvation to only at the end of the age change his mind. God is faithful, today, tomorrow, and forever.

Brothers and sisters, God will not fail you. If he has given you faith, you will endure. IF you are listening to this today and you have lost your faith, or are going through a time of hardship, sickness, or persecution and you are blaming God for it, I tell you now, examine yourself, is your faith of God which shall endure, or is it something you built up yourself, the type that James is warning us to not be deceived of, if you find yourself doubting or blaming God, run to Him for it is only he who can comfort you and deliver you. Run the race, Endure to the end.

This very same God, who is unchanging, who is all love, and all grace. Who has by his own will adopted you into his family will keep his promises. He will deliver you, maybe not from your trial, persecution or hardship today, but he will deliver you from condemnation, judgment, and hell. To him be all Glory, honor and Praise.