

“Count It All Joy” James 1:4-12

Introduction

- Unnamed example.
- The structure of James. Difficult to pinpoint main themes.
- Erroneous view of Christian trials. Verse 12 does not mean that God is watching the world and trying to spot people who are able to white-knuckle their faith through a trial and choosing them for eternal life because they were successful. The promise of eternal life is a promise of God made in eternity past. The testing of our faith is for our benefit. It is God’s way of strengthening us and giving us assurance that we are His in Christ.

1. The Command (1:2)

² *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,*

- The Greek word *hegeomai* (consider) is an imperative or command. It is not a suggestion or good advice. God, through James is commanding all true believers to consider or think of trials as joy. Not just as occasions for moments of joy, but the entirety of every trial to be for joy. Joyful to be in a trial, joyful to endure a trial, and joyful to receive the reward gained from enduring trials. All of it pure joy.
- Does this mean we should be dancing at funerals of deceased lost loved ones? No! It means that we should always be mindful that the purpose and end result of every trial of every kind is meant to result in our good and therefore something we can rejoice in it, through it, and over it.
- That joy is often hidden deep down underneath layers of sorrow and sadness, but it is there nonetheless.
- We must begin here by admitting this is not natural. This is not possible in the flesh. This is not the way we think about and respond to trials of any kind, much less the difficult and painful ones. We are going to need more information that this James!
- Thank God, James will give us more info. He is going to introduce a series of ideas and themes that he will expound on in the remainder of his letter. He is going to give snippets of information that will tell us what to expect out of our trials, what we are to do during our trials that will help us accomplish this great

command, and also an example of one of the trials his audience was facing that we also continue to deal with today.

2. What to Expect (1:3-4;12)

- If we know the end result of our trials from God's perspective, we will be able to consider or think of them as all joy. Otherwise, we tend to get overwhelmed by the details of our situations and miss the bigger picture.
- Here are the 2 results of enduring trials that will cause us to consider them all joy

Temporally

³ *for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

- We will talk more about it in a moment but the trials of various kinds is qualified by the phrase "testing of your faith". The trials James is talking about are situations, circumstances, and temptations that test Christian faith. Remember, James primary concern is not grief counseling, but encouraging genuine and sincere faith. (Paul Washer)
- In this life, on this earth, these trials are meant to produce a steadfastness in us that will result in a more perfect and complete spiritual life where we lack nothing. Let's look at 2 Peter 1:3-10 for a commentary on this verse.

³ *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. ⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. ⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful*

in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. ¹⁰ Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

Eternally

¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

- The eternal reward for those who endure trials is the crown of life in Glory. Peter says it like this at the conclusion of the passage we just read;

¹¹ For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:11).

- Before these results can affect your attitude toward trials you have to care about them. Do you care at all about reaching spiritual maturity? Does the reality of your crown of life and entrance into the eternal kingdom of Christ really matter to you? That is what James wants you to think about right now. The answers can help you determine the sincerity of your profession.
- If you can honestly say you do not desire spiritual maturity and a crown of life and would exchange those things to escape trial, you are not a Christian and need to repent right now.

3. The Execution (1:5-8)

- How do we execute this command? Is it something that God expects us to do in our power? Will God help us? If so, how much is God and how much is us?
- Here is how James responds:

⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

- The one key ingredient for successfully enduring trials for the Christian is Godly wisdom. This is not the same as general wisdom found in the world, which many people possess. Let's look at James' brief commentary on the difference in 3:13-18.

¹³ *Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.* ¹⁴ *But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.* ¹⁵ *This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.* ¹⁶ *For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.* ¹⁷ *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.* ¹⁸ *And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

- What is the difference? Earthly wisdom is self-seeking, while God's wisdom is *first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.*
- When you pray for wisdom in a trial are you truly open to receive God's instruction or do you seek to justify your decisions by saying "I prayed about it"?
- I want to point out a key word with only 3 letters that bears so much weight on this issue. It is used 4 times in the 10 verses that we are studying this morning. It is the word *let*. It translates an imperative verb in the Greek, which makes it an explicit command from God. It is not a suggestion or a word of advice, but it is a command.
- The command here is to ask God for His wisdom to help you understand and respond properly to your trials. In other words, pray. Pray and ask God for His wisdom and if you ask in true faith He will give it.
- God loves to give it freely without "reprimand". How many of you have that dad that you know if you need his help with something and you go ask, he will give it to you, but it will always come with a long lecture. So, unless it is do or die, you don't even bother. That's not God. He is waiting on His children to ask Him for his wisdom and direction in every trial. Part of the reason He allows our trials is to bring us to him in prayer seeking His wisdom.

Do you really believe that?

- If not James says your, *like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind and that “must not suppose that you will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ you are a double-minded man, unstable in all your ways.*

- This could be a challenge to the sincerity of a profession or a challenge to a Christian’s faith.

4. The Example (1:9-11)

- What kind of trials is James talking about? Situations, circumstances, and temptations of various kinds that “test your faith” (1:3).
- James is going to point out a situation that was prevalent in his world that affected the church greatly. There was a great divide in the community between the rich and the poor. The church at this time was predominantly poor, but there were some rich that had been converted and joined to the church. The problems of the society had made their way into the church (2:1-13).
- James will sometimes make reference to the rich/poor problems in society (5:1-6) and sometimes within the church among believers (2:1-13). This next verse addresses the problems that both the rich and poor face. These are trials that test their faith even if they are not obviously trials. I believe that is why he points these out here.

⁹ *Let the lowly brother (poor and of low position) boast (glory or rejoice) in his exaltation, ¹⁰ and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. ¹¹ For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.*

- James is using this example of a relevant trial to teach about an attitude necessary for enduring all trials. It is an attitude of humility in light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The poor man needs to be focused not on what he does not have in the world, but what he does have in Christ. The rich man needs to focus on who he truly is in light of the gospel (a wretched sinner saved by grace) and not on who the world thinks he is in light of his worldly possessions and position.
- Verse 11 is borrowed from Isaiah 40:6-8; Ps. 102:4, 11; 1103:15). James uses Scripture to teach that to focus on the pursuit of riches is a waste of God given life. The same is true for the poor man. Focusing on poverty and coveting the possessions of the rich is a waste of God given life. Focus on the gospel!

Conclusion:

- James is the messenger but God is the One commanding us to transform our understanding of trials. They are designed to test our faith and bring us to spiritual maturity. Our hope of eternal life allows us to not only endure trials but to consider them all joy. Only God provides the wisdom necessary to do this and He commands us to ask Him for His wisdom. He loves to give it to us. There are many forms of trials, many of which we may not even see as trials at the time, but all require a gospel-centered attitude to endure.
- Let's take this time right now to bring our trials to God and ask for wisdom.

CG Questions

1. What are the two main products of trials that we should focus on when we go through them? **Steadfastness that leads to spiritual maturity and eternal life.**
2. According to the sermon how can we define trials of various kinds as James defines them? **Any situation, circumstance, or temptation that tests our faith.**
3. What is the first thing we should do when a trial happens in our life? **Go to God in prayer and ask for His wisdom.**
4. According to James 3:13-18 what is the difference between God's wisdom and the wisdom of this world?
5. According to 1:6-8, do you think James is talking about doubting Christians or a person who does not truly have a saving faith? What are the implications for both views?
6. What are your thoughts on James' example of a trial using the rich/poor person divide?
7. Has your economic status ever affected your faith? In what ways?

8. Would anyone like to take this opportunity to share about a situation that may be currently testing your faith? I encourage leaders to take notes on replies and lead these individuals in prayer.