

THE TEST OF SUFFERING

James 1:2-4

INTRODUCTION

Tests of a living faith –for James, there is no Christianity apart from a living faith – a saving faith is a living and active faith

19th Century English Commentator Robert Johnstone –

“Affliction lets down a blazing torch for him into the depths of his own nature – and he sees many things which he little expected to see. He finds his faith weak where he thought it strong, his views dim where he thought them clear.”

The Word of God is amazing. It always has hope in it but at the same time it is a refining and challenging hope. We see that in today’s passage.

READ James 1:2-4

➔ The Test of Suffering

Proposition – 3 Anchors to hold onto in your suffering

- 1) God’s **Command** in your suffering→testing
- 2) God’s **Purpose** for your suffering→training
- 3) The final **Result** of your suffering→fruition

So That: You will have the right attitude toward trials and to comfort you in your suffering and trials, to encourage you to endure

First anchor....

I. God’s Command in Your Suffering

1:2

Point – God commands you to rejoice in suffering

- begins with a command which sets the foundation for why God allows suffering in our lives
- it is powerful and punches through the superficial things that creep into Christianity
- we will have suffering in our lives
- God wants us to understand this so we have a right understanding in the midst of our suffering
- It is a challenge and goes against Western thinking
- what it means to have a clear conscience and a rich hope in Christ
- we bring God glory when we suffer well
- we build spiritual muscles in our suffering

“There are no lessons so useful as those learned in the school of affliction.” – JC Ryle

Proof – James 1:2 – “Consider it all joy, my brethren when you encounter various trials”

“my brethren” – affectionate address – pastoral tone

- James’ audience are Jews scattered in diaspora and, more specifically, believing Jews (**1:1 – “twelve tribes”**)

A. Trials are Inescapable

- they will come
- they may come at anytime

James writes **“when”** not **“if”** → **“whenever”** might be better

- timing uncertain, sporadic, they come upon you unexpectedly
- do not be surprised by suffering!!!

“trials” - external or internal afflictions – **1 Pet 4:12**

- only appearance of word outside of NT and Septuagint is in a medical discourse where it was used to describe experiments on diseases
- for a Christian, every external trial becomes an internal test
- do we respond as the world does or as God would have us respond?
- diagnostic → “Dr. James”

B. Many Different Kinds of Trials

- they will come in many different shapes and forms

“**various**” – trials of many shapes and colors – at end of phrase for emphasis

C. Rejoice! All built up to the command

→ “**Consider it all joy**”

- James does not say to feel it all joy or trials are all joy – he says consider it all joy
- aorist imperative + subjunctive – urgent, immediately whenever encountered

Illustration – when someone we love is hot with fever, we get a thermometer to check their temperature. In the same way, when the furnace of trial is cranked up, Dr. James gets the “Joyometer”

“**all joy**” – emphatically at the beginning – nothing but, only joy
→ supremely joyful

Luke 2:10 – the angel to the shepherds “**I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people**”

John 15:11; 17:13 – at the heart of Christ’s ministry – saving us from the power of sin – one day He will save us from the presence of sin in our glorification

Phil 4:4 – not happiness – not based on circumstances which happiness is based on

“**all joy**” at beginning of clause for emphasis

- From the Lord
- Tied to the peace that passes all understanding
- God’s blessing to us

- your life trials put you on display for others to see
- this begs the question.....what do they see?

The church should be characterized by Joy →

(Counter) Illustration: Story of a church in Scotland in which someone had been bored by the sermon and had begun doodling. He started drawing pictures of the preacher and then actually wrote a poem. When the service was over, a janitor found his poem:

*To dwell above with the saints I love,
Aye, that will be glory!
To dwell below with saints I know,
Not that’s a different story.*

Application: Do not view trials for what they are but view them for what God can accomplish through them!

The **joy of suffering** is one of the blessings from God that Christians have the most difficulty truly realizing in their lives.

Second anchor.....

II. God’s Purpose In Your Suffering 1:3

Point – **Why?** Why do believers suffer?

Recurring theme in the General Epistles (Hebrews -Jude or Revelation) is suffering and endurance on the part of the audience of the letters. Most of the recipients seem to be undergoing suffering and trials.

Illustration: Little children will repeatedly ask – “Why?”

→ sometimes you explain to the child

→ sometimes you tell the child that they must just do it

Here, God explains why – the purpose or reason for your suffering

Proof – **James 1:3** – “**knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.**”

What is the basis for this supernatural joy?

How do we get it?

→ Sound doctrine.

“**knowing**” – Sound doctrine is the basis for true joy

Psalm 19:8; 119:14 – the Bible is right and perfect and it rejoices the heart;

1 John 1:3-4 – the fellowship of the saints is tied into the fellowship of the trinity for God’s glory and joy is at the heart of it and joy comes from fellowship with God

Romans 15:13 – joy comes from understanding the truth

“**the testing of your faith**” → theme of James

“**your faith**” is literally “the faith” – specific, the one true faith

“**testing**” –Psalm 12:6; Prov 27:21 – the process by which silver or gold is refined by fire

- “silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times.”

1 Cor 11:18-19!

Illustration: – the tempered metal is more precious than the raw material

1 Pet 1:6-7 – that is the purpose

- It isn't for your suffering
- It is so that your faith is refined
- So that it results in the praise and glory and honor in the revelation of Christ

God's Stated Purpose → “endurance”

- a steadfast course of action in spite of difficulties and testing
- perseverance, endurance, fortitude, staying power
- it is not a passive attitude of submission, but a brave heart of courage which confronts the difficulties with patience

Endurance is the heart attitude the Christian maintains during difficult circumstances

- **James 5:11** – gives us a great illustration of this kind of endurance
- He reminds us of Job – and all his difficulties
- James' point: In the same way that Job endured in his suffering, that is the same task that God has for us

Application: If we respond wrongly to a test, it becomes a temptation

- Wrong Response?
 - It's not fair
 - I deserve better
 - Why me? ... etc.

RC Sproul – from his book “**Surprised by Suffering**”

“There are times when we suffer innocently at other people’s hands. When that occurs, we are victims of injustice. But that injustice happens on a horizontal plane. No one ever suffers injustice on the vertical plane. That is, no one ever suffers unjustly in terms of his or her relationship with God. As long as we bear the guilt of sin, we cannot protest that God is unjust in allowing us to suffer.”

Your existing faith is strengthened by trials

- produces a deeper, stronger faith
- a purging and purifying of faith
- focus on what we deserve, which is judgment – then whatever we are suffering pales in comparison
- this strengthens us in the Refiner’s fire

Suffering blows away the chaff of error and sin

Martin Lloyd-Jones – *“Those who suffer best realize that even the worst and most painful parts of life relate directly to the soul and to our walk with God.”*

Acts 5:41 – “So they (the apostles) went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name.”

Rom 5:3 – “And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance”

Col 1:24 – “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake”

Turn to: 1 Pet 4:12-14

Application: Do not view trials for what they are, view them for what God can accomplish through them!

- endurance is not the end in and of itself
- it leads to something even more important...

Third anchor.....

III. The Result of Your Suffering 1:4

Point – Spiritual Maturity, character development to its fullest extent!

Proof – James 1:4 – “**And let endurance have *its* perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing**”

“**Let**” - is a command, not a suggestion, not an option from God

1:2 – “**Consider**” – summary command → “Do it know!”

- instantly consider the suffering all joy

1:4 – “**Let**” – present imperative – keep on letting that endurance have its perfect result

ina – purpose statement – “so that”

“**that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing**”

- Maturity – complete and strong suffering Christian
 - A ripeness and richness of knowledge and character
- Sufficiency – all the virtues, all nine fruits of the spirit
 - “**complete, lacking in nothing**”

The attitude God commands of you through James is directly in contrast and vastly superior to the natural human reaction to trials of complaining and self-pity

How does the Natural Man respond?

- complaining - self-pity - denial - anger ...

How do You respond? → Joy!

Illustration: My wife, Margie, was sitting with our family at the kitchen table a couple of Saturdays ago. Tears were streaming down her face from her pain. In the midst of this, she was saying how she could live through this pain for years if God would just somehow be glorified through it.

Application:

1. Sanctify your suffering!
2. Embrace your suffering!
3. Grow spiritually through your suffering!
4. Glorify God through your suffering!

Beloved, when you obey God in this, you will endure trials in a way that God mercifully makes you feel them the least.

- The physical pain may still be there
- The emotional pain may still be there
- We will be filled up with the joy and satisfaction and knowledge of Christ in the here and now.

MacArthur – “obedience in the midst of suffering is the perfect formula to be used by God”

- available for any Christian in any trial

CONCLUSION

Illustration: The great hymn writer Fanny Crosby went blind when she was 5 years old. She lived to be 95 years old – 90 years of blindness. Her life was characterized by trust, by satisfaction in the Lord, by the supernatural joy that comes from a faithful walk with Jesus. When she was just 8 years old, just 3 years after she went blind, she wrote this little poem:

*Oh, what a happy soul I am,
Although I cannot see,
I am resolved that in this world
Contented I will be.*

*How many blessings I enjoy
That other people don't
To weep and sigh because I'm blind
I cannot nor I won't.*

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