

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Turning Trials into Triumph James 1:2-12 Part Five

We have introduced this epistle by saying that the theme is “Tests of A Living Faith.” The first of those tests is the, Response To Trials Test. We find this test in vv. 2-12. Let us open our Bibles to James and read **James 1:2-12. “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, (3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. (4) And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (5) But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (6) But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. (7) For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, (8) being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (9) But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position; (10) and let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. (11) For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass; and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away. (12) Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”** What is the proper response to trials? Perseverance. Those who persevere in the midst of trials possess genuine, living, saving faith. And those who do not persevere most likely do not possess a genuine, living, saving faith.

Perseverance is not just gritting your teeth and getting yourself through a difficulty. It is, rather, manifesting or demonstrating a love for God in the midst of our difficulties. Again let us look at v. 12 **“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who (what?) love Him.”**

Those who have living faith, saving faith, will persevere in loving God in the midst of their trials. And those who do not have living faith, saving faith, will not persevere in loving God in the midst of their trials. There are a number of different elements that contribute to a proper response in the midst of our trials. There are a number of different factors that must come into play if we are going to be exemplary in this area of perseverance in respect to our response.

The first element is a JOYOUS ATTITUDE. Look at v. 2 **“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials.”** We are to once and for all consider our trials as “joy” and the joy that we experience as a result of this decision will hopefully be unmixed with other reactions. Or in other words, the joy that we feel in the midst of our trial will actually dominate all other thinking or feelings. If we find ourselves in fact being obedient to this command of “counting it all joy when we encounter various trials, we will have achieved a state of maturity that many Christians have stumbled over. But this is the mark that the Lord has set before us and therefore, we should strive to obtain it. But this will not consistently happen until we have experienced the second element that this passage talks about.

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The second element that must be present if we are going to respond properly to trials is an understanding mind. Before we can expect to yield ourselves to the command to count it all joy we need to understand why this would be an appropriate response. **V. 3** gives us the answer to this question. **V. 3 “knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.”** Our joy comes from seeing endurance produced in our lives and knowing that the presence of endurance brings with it the potential for immediate and positive benefits.

The first benefit that we shared was the potential for a growing and vibrant hope. We have seen this in **v. 12 “Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”** As we see perseverance or endurance being produced in our lives in the midst of trials, we are being repeatedly reassured that the crown of life is awaiting us in glory. It is as if, when we encounter various trials and we continue to persevere, that the light at the end of our tunnel is getting brighter and brighter.

Another benefit that we shared with you was the potential for greater maturity. We saw this in **v. 4 “and let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”** God uses trials in our lives to mold us and shape us into the people that He would have us to be. He uses trials to keep us dependent upon Him. He uses trials to cause us to grow in holiness. He uses trials to prepare us for greater service. If we in fact believe that God is using a particular trial in our lives to accomplish a good and glorious end then we are much better able to count it all joy in the midst of our difficulty. But what happens if we find it difficult in a particular trial to count it all joy? What happens if we really have begun to question God’s goodness and His plan for our lives? What happens if we really don’t know that all this pain we have encountered will produce a wonderful conclusion? This leads us to a third element. If we are going to consistently respond to the difficulties in our lives properly, we will need to have a joyful attitude, an understanding mind and a strategic and focused prayer life.

A Strategic and Sincere Prayer Life

Let us read **vv. 5-8, “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (6) But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. (7) For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”** The thought is that if any one of the readers find themselves unable to count it all joy when they encounter various trials then they will need help from the Lord.

Why do we need wisdom when we are going through trials? Why not ask for strength, or grace, or even deliverance? For this reason: We need wisdom so we will not waste the opportunities God is giving us to mature. Wisdom helps us understand how God can use our circumstances for our good and God’s glory.

I read a story of a pastor who had a secretary who was going through great trials. She had had a stroke, her husband had become blind, and then he had to be taken to the hospital where everyone thought that he would die.

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The pastor said that he saw her in church one Sunday and assured her that he was praying for her. She responded, “What are you asking God to do?” And he responded “I’m asking God to help you and strengthen you.” She said that she appreciated that but then asked him to pray about one more thing. “Pray that I’ll have the wisdom not to waste all of this.”

She knew the meaning of **James 1:5**, “**But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.**” God wants us to benefit from the difficulties that come to our lives. He wants us to get the full benefit of those trials. Certainly this should also be our desire as well. If I am going to have to suffer, or if you are suffering, let us not waste the opportunity it affords us by not being able to see beyond our pain.

So it is very important for us to understand the need for wisdom in the midst of trials and to pray for it. But can we be assured that God will answer our prayer? What does the verse tell us? Not only will He give us wisdom, He will give us wisdom generously. And He will do this without reproach. He will not in any way see our request as being out of line at all. He knows our weaknesses. He understands our shortcomings. And wants us to come to Him and ask Him for wisdom. And when He bestows it upon us hopefully we will be in a position to do what? Count it all joy. This is strategic praying. But our praying for wisdom must also be sincere.

Look at vv. 6-8, “**But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. (7) for let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, (8) being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.**” It is not only important to know what we are to pray for, when we are in trials, but it is also important to know how we are to pray.

And how are we to pray? We are to pray in faith. Look at v. 6 “**but let him ask in faith without any doubting.**” When we think of praying in faith without any doubting we might think of someone vacillating between great faith and little faith. But this is not the emphasis of this verse. This is not a vacillation between great faith and little faith, but rather it describes a person who is suspended between two opinions and who is therefore unable to ask in faith at all. He may be able mouthing the right words but his prayer is insincere.

Look at v. 8 a moment. What does v. 8 say? It tells us that the man who does not pray in faith but doubts is a “**double-minded**” man. The word “**double-minded**” comes from a Greek word (DIPSUCHOS) which literally means “two-souled.” The individual is in a state of oscillation between the competing desires within him. Although he has given expression to his petition to God, he is not at rest in himself concerning what he has asked. Now he wants the things asked for, and then again he desires something else. His inner yearnings are divided between God and the world. Look at what James says in **James 4:3-4**, “**You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. (4) You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.** We cannot, as professing believers, have our cake and eat it too. We must choose what we are living for and our prayers need to begin to reflect this new way of thinking. Our prayers need to reflect an undivided heart and a Christ centered focus.

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The indecisiveness that James is speaking about in this passage is not merely a state of mental indecision, but an inner moral conflict. The man who is doubting is divided between the desire to say yes and no at the same time, with the inclination to say no gaining the upper hand. It is an inner unwillingness to rely wholly upon God. As a man named Steir aptly said, “A doubting petitioner offers not to God a steady hand or heart, so that he cannot deposit in it his gift.”

This is not only true of our request for wisdom, but in any request that we know to be God’s will. If we are lusting after a woman and we pray “Lord deliver me from this lust” while still yearning in our heart for the woman who we have been desiring, the Lord will not answer that prayer. And this is so also in our prayer for wisdom.

Let me ask you a question. Do people in general want to rejoice in the midst of their trials, believing that God is performing a good work? And I believe that the answer would have to be, no! People do not want to rejoice in the midst of their trials, believing that God in spite of their trials is being benevolent toward them. What do people want? They want their trials to just simply go away. They want their spouse back, their child back, their health back, their job back. They want to be free from pain. And all of this is very understandable. But we cannot, as the disciples of Christ, want to be free of pain more than we want to be like Christ. Therefore, in the midst of our difficulties, we can certainly pray to the Lord, “let this cup pass from me.” But God forbid that we should ever want this more than we want His will done in our lives.

When we ask for wisdom so that we might be able to rejoice in various trials, we must want this more than we want to be free from the difficulties. We must be single-minded. We must be sincere. Otherwise we will be double-minded and our lives will be very unsatisfying.

James compares this condition to “**the surf of the sea.**” Look again at v. 6, “**But let him ask in faith without doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.**” The water of the sea or the surf of the sea has no inner stability to stand against the outer forces. And because of this we see the surf of the sea not only going up and down but also back and forth. The surf of the sea is a vivid picture of four-dimensional instability. Many Christians live like corks on the waves: up one minute, down the next; tossed back and forth. This kind of experience is an evidence of immaturity.

What happens if we pray for wisdom but want deliverance? Again let us look at vv. 7-8, “**For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, (8) being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.**” If we pray for wisdom but want deliverance, our prayers will be ineffectual. But you might say shouldn’t the Lord reward us at least for giving an appearance of wanting something even if we don’t? No, He doesn’t. Why should He?

The bigger issue in our life is not whether or not we have an understanding of God’s purpose in our lives for trials, but whether or not we are willing to humble ourselves before the Lord and trust Him with our lives. What good is it if we get our cabin clean on an ocean liner if the ship is sinking.