

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

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

We have introduced this epistle by saying that the theme is “Tests of A Living Faith.” James was written so that we might know that we in fact possess genuine, living, saving 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 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 factors that work together to produce the kind of perseverance that this passage is talking about. And each of these factors is addressed in the passage that we have just read.

The first factor is a joyous attitude. If we are unable to rejoice in the midst of our trials we have not yet achieved the standard of excellence that should characterize our lives when we speak of perseverance. We may demonstrate our love for the Lord in other ways which certainly would be indicative of perseverance but the specific way our love for the Lord should be manifested in the context of this passage would be to respond with a joyful 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.

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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 factor that this passage talks about.

The second factor 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**, says, “**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 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. By strategic I mean that we are praying for the right things. In this case, within this context, we need to be praying for wisdom. Look at **v. 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.**” The thought is if we understood what God was seeking to accomplish in the midst of our trials we would be able to rejoice. But if we are finding it difficult to rejoice, perhaps we do not understand what God is trying to accomplish. If this is the case, we need to pray for wisdom. 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 His glory.

But it is not only important to know what we are to pray for, it is also important to know how we are to pray. When we pray for wisdom we must pray sincerely.

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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 being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”** The doubting man in these verses is a double-minded man. A double minded man is a man who has his inner yearnings divided between God and the things of the world. A double minded man, or a doubting petitioner, does not offer to God a steady hand or heart so that God can deposit into his hands the gift of wisdom. This leads us to the final and last element that is necessary if we are going to respond to trials properly.

A Heart Set On Things Above Rather Than On Things Of Earth

Before we can pray sincerely for wisdom to understand God’s purposes for various trials in our lives, we must have a heart that is undivided. A heart that has set its affection on the things above rather than on the things of earth. And this is the emphasis of **verses 9-11**. Let us look at these verses, **“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.”** It might appear to you that there is no mention of a professing believers heart being set on things above rather than on the things of earth in these verses but this is exactly what these verses are in fact talking about.

Let us look at v. 9, **“But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position.”** The verse stands in contrast with what has come before. Rather than being double minded, rather than being two souled, rather than being torn between what God has purposed for our lives and the world, rather than this, **“let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position.”** This professing believer of humble circumstances is being commanded to do something. This professing believer, who from the standpoint of the world would be considered poor is being commanded to do what? He is being commanded to **“glory”** in his **“high position.”**

The word for “glory” (KAUCHASTHO) is translated in the NIV “to take pride.” This is not such a bad translation. This verb in the Greek stands emphatically at the beginning of the sentence. The verb denotes a strong personal reaction, a feeling of pride or exaltation in the contemplation of his high position. It encompasses the individual’s total reaction, both his inward feeling and outward expression of exultation. The commentator Zodhiates said the word means, “to profess loudly something that you have a right to be proud of.” Obviously James did not believe that a gloomy downcast attitude should characterize a believer who lacks money or material wealth. Why? Because our financial position, no matter how bad it might be, should not overwhelm the joy, the exultation, the pride we experience when we consider our high position. What high position? Not our high position in terms of the world, but obviously our high position in terms of Christ. This may not be the view of the world but this is the view of God. And it serves us well to value what God values.

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John Calvin wrote the following, “Since it is incomparably the greatest dignity to be introduced into the company of angels, nay, to be made the associates of Christ, he who estimates this favor of God aright, will regard all other things as worthless.” This is why Paul said in **Phil. 3:7-8** **“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. (8) More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.”** Because of our high position any lack of the things of this world should not be a problem for us. Our attitude should be very much like the attitude expressed in the following verse:

A tent or a cottage, why should I care?
They're building a palace for me over there,
Tho' exiled from home, yet, still I may sing:
All glory to God, I'm a child of the King.

The world and the things of the world should hold no attraction for us in our poverty as we contemplate our high and lofty position in Christ. The world and the things of the world should also hold no attraction for us in our earthly abundance either. This leads us to **vv. 10-11**.

Look at **v. 10-11**, **“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.”**

In **v. 9**, the brother of humble means was commanded to glory in his “high position.” In these verses, the rich man is being commanded to glory in his “humiliation.” To understand what James is referring to when he uses the word humiliation, we first of all have to understand whether the rich man is a Christian or is not a Christian. I believe that the structure of **vv. 10-11** would clearly indicate that James has a rich Christian in mind. Lenski gives the following very literal rendering of these verses which I believe supports what I have just said, “Now let him boast, the brother, the lowly one in his high position; on the other hand, the rich one, in his lowly position!” The balanced structure implies that both particular adjectives, “the lowly one” as well as “the rich one,” relate to the same noun - “the brother.” This parallel structure indicates that James thought of both as brothers and that the imperative verb goes with both. And doesn't this make sense? James knew, as well as we know, the danger of wealth for a Christian.

James is commanding that not only should the poor Christian glory in his high position but that the rich Christian glory in his humiliation. What is the humiliation referring to? I believe that the humiliation is the passing away of the rich man's earthly abundance. Look at the end of **v. 10** and **v. 11** **“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.”** James is reminding the rich Christians that all they possess will fade away and come to nothing. This is the humiliation that James is referring to in respect to the rich Christian.

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But why should the rich Christian glory in this humiliation. Because whether we as Christians are poor in respect to the things of this world or rich in respect to the things of this world our destiny is still the same, GLORY.

CONCLUSION

James was written so that we might know whether or not we possess genuine, living, saving faith. The very first test given to us in this epistle is the response to trials test. What is the proper response to trials? PERSEVERANCE. A persevering love for God no matter how painful our situation.

A number of different factors need to be present in order to produce the kind of perseverance mentioned in verses 2-12.

The first factor is a joyful attitude. There are a number of different ways for us to express our love for the Lord in the midst of trials. But in the context of this passage, our love for the Lord would be expressed by counting it all joy when we encounter various trials.

If you have in fact experienced a joyful attitude in the midst of trials, I know something about you. You are a believer who has come to the point in your life where you can see the bigger picture. You have come to the place in your life where you have an understanding mind. You can see that the endurance produced through trials benefits you in extremely important ways.

If you have in fact experienced an understanding mind, then I know something else about you. You are most likely a believer who has a strategic and sincere prayer life. You have been able, in those times of confusion, when you have perhaps struggled with seeing what God was trying to do in or through you, to sincerely pray for wisdom.

If you have in fact experienced a strategic and sincere prayer life, then I know something else about you. I know that you have set your affection on things above rather than on things of earth. What happens here is of relatively little importance compared to what you are looking forward to in glory. And this is true whether you are poor or rich. It doesn't matter.

If you are here this weekend and are in fact a true believer possessing living faith, know this, if you have set your affection on things above and not on things of earth, this will ultimately, in time as you mature, result in you counting it all joy when you fall into various trials. This manifestation of joy is a clear and dramatic testimony to your perseverance. And the promise of v. 12, will therefore come alive to us. What does it say again? **“Blessed is the 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.”**