

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Life Application Sunday School Class

Book of James - Session 1

January 13, 2001

JAMES 1:2

² *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.*

- I just lost my job. I have been with the company of over 25 years.
- The doctor says that it won't go away. I will have pain for the rest of my life, and it probably will get worse.
- They broke into our house, and ransacked it. I don't even think our insurance will replace half of what was taken.
- Our son refused to come to church. He wants nothing to do with our religion. He says it is for weaklings. He despises anything to do with our beliefs.
- Both kids have terrible colds. They whine and cry all day long. On top of that, we are having people over tonight for dinner, I have a headache, and feel like I'm coming down with that cold.
- I just got the letter. My boyfriend says he doesn't want to see me anymore. I thought we may be married some day.
- My husband is seeing another woman. He says that he doesn't love me anymore, and wants a divorce.
- Cancer. My wife may have six months to live.

The world says: Be happy when it is going your way, but be unhappy when it is not going your way. I can be happy when I feel good, but I am unhappy when I feel bad.

But the word for the Christian is:

1. Believers are commanded to rejoice.

If it is commanded, then it means we can choose to rejoice in the midst of trials. To be obedient and pleasing to the Lord in this area of joy, we must first understand and accept the fact that the Word of God plainly teaches us that we are to rejoice in the face of trials.

God says: ² *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.* The book of James was a letter written to Jewish believers that had been scattered probably from persecution. It is likely that some of them had lost homes, and been separated from loved ones. They were certainly facing hardships of many kinds. And James starts his letter telling them to count it all joy when facing these various difficulties.

Other New Testament writers in no uncertain terms command us to always rejoice, especially in times of opposition, hardship, and difficulty. Paul, while in prison, and facing possible execution for his faith says in Phil 4:4 *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!* In another passage he says: *I Thess 5: 15 See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. 16 Rejoice always; 17 pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Peter, writing to Christians living under severe Roman persecution, writes as follows in I Peter 4:12-16 ¹²

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

Jesus Himself, instructed His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5

: ¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

First, we must accept that God commands us to rejoice when facing trials.

2. The command to rejoice is not a command to feel happy.

It is not something that we will always feel. Though our rejoicing will many times lead us into feelings of happiness and even euphoria, these emotions can come and go, and are not the substance of true, biblical joy. This passage is not teaching us that we should never grieve. It does not mean that we never to be sad, or carry burdens. It is not sinful to shed tears of sadness. It is not saying that if I am spiritual, and in fellowship with the Lord, that I will always feel happy. The apostle Paul expressed great grief over those who opposed him and the faith. Jesus Himself said that those who mourn are blessed, and wept at the tomb of Lazarus when He saw the grief of those He loved. Paul stated in the letter of Philippians that the Lord spared him the grief and sorrow of losing Epaphroditus by healing him. To say that we are always to rejoice in the Lord does not mean that we never feel sadness or grief.

3. We are enabled to rejoice by considering the ultimate purpose of our trials.

The literal meaning of the word "consider" in verse 2 is "to lead, to rule, to command, or to have authority over." In the context, it means this: When facing trials, our minds are to take the lead, not our feelings. We are to respond in accordance with what we know to be true by faith, and not necessarily with what we are feeling and seeing.

So what is it that we know, that we need to consider in the time of trial. We know that the Sovereign Lord of the universe is directing our circumstances to produce something in us – completeness and maturity. If we understand the Lord's purpose and goal in our trials, we can learn to rejoice. What is the ultimate goal of our lives? It is for us to become like Christ – to grow up into His likeness. God has saved us and is refining and preparing us for the purpose of expressing His glory. God uses trials in the preparation process.

How does an Olympic weightlifter prepare for the competition? He has a trainer that provides a program designed to strengthen his muscles through regular, disciplined exercise. The Sovereign Lord of heaven, who is in complete control of everything that happens, has designed the events of our lives to prepare us to display His glory. Trials that He allows and sends our way have the capacity for strengthening our faith. We rejoice in trials based on what we know to be true by faith, not what we are seeing and feeling. This is how trials test and strengthen our faith. We have to exercise faith and trust in our sovereign God during a trial to rejoice. As we choose to trust and believe God in difficult circumstances, our faith grows stronger and increased our ability to stand strong. God desires us to be strong, stable, mature believers with strong conviction and faith. To arrive at that goal, we must go this spiritual "boot camp". And this training program is tailored and designed to specifically target our weak areas and strengthen us.

We profess to believe in Christ. If we profess salvation, we have made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

He is our Savior, our Lord, our Master, our Shepherd, our King. That is our profession of faith. Those are words that will be tested. For that profession to be proven to be true faith and conviction, it must be tested. In the midst of the fire of the trial, whatever is not true will be consumed, but whatever is true will be purified and strengthened. Trials strengthen our faith, enabling us to persevere and mature with the goal of bringing glory to our Savior.

So in the midst of hardships and trials, we understand that God is strengthening what is eternal – our faith in Christ, and removing what is temporal, things like idols of the heart, and earthly affections, so that we can be mature believers that will display His likeness and glory. We don't rejoice because of the pain, the suffering, the loss, the difficulty – no, we rejoice in the purpose that God is fulfilling in and through us. We rejoice that He is making us fit to display His glory. If we are saved, our heart cries out to see the glory of the Lord. We desire to see the Lord receive the glory due His name in our lives. And we have the great hope that one day He will do just that. In Romans 8, Paul stated that the present sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in us. As we yield to the work of the Spirit in our lives through trials, God is actually increasing our capacity to display His glory. That is something to rejoice in. As we view our hardships with this perspective, we will count it all joy.

Peter stated it this way in I Peter 1:

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

4. We can rejoice in trials as God displays His faithfulness and salvation.

What is even more amazing is that as we choose to rejoice in the midst of trials, we can display the glory and grace of Savior even in this present age as we are being transformed and prepared for our future revealing as a son of God. Paul said that he gloried in the hardship, adversity, and weakness of his life, because through his weakness the strength and glory of the Lord is displayed.

Many times God chooses to supernaturally deliver us from the hardship or difficulty to display His faithfulness, mercy, and glory. Remember the blind man in John 9. Jesus said he was blind for the purpose of displaying God's glory in his healing. How can we know the deliverance of God, except we first be in danger. How could we experience the provision of God without need? To be healed, we must first be sick. Why did God allow man to fall into sin? Was it not so that He could display His glory, mercy, and grace through salvation? God says that we are to call in Him in the time of trouble, and He will hear our cry, and deliver us. Jesus says to ask, and receive, so that our joy might be made full. God receives glory as we call out to Him in our distress, and He delivers us. He takes great delight in meeting our needs and showing His goodness and grace in response to our cries for help.

Ps 63: ⁷ says Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.

Ps 86: ³Be merciful unto me, O Lord: for I cry unto thee daily. ⁴Rejoice the soul of thy servant: for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. ⁵For thou, Lord, *art* good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee. ⁶Give ear, O LORD, unto my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications. ⁷In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me.

The next time trouble comes your way, consider it all joy, for God is up to something that is good for you and will bring Him great glory.