

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Life Application Sunday School Class

Book of James - Session 2

January 20, 2002

REVIEW:

JAMES 1:2

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

1. Believers are commanded to rejoice.

If it is commanded, then it is possible.

The NT commands are numerous: Phil 4:4 Rejoice always I Thess 5:18 In everything give thanks; I Peter 4:12-16 Rejoice in persecution and suffering; Mt 5: Leap for joy when suffering for Christ

2. The command to rejoice is not a command to feel, but to consider.

The word "consider" means we are to allow our thinking to take the lead, not our feelings. Feelings will follow right thinking and acting. What is it we are to consider (that produces joy)?

- God is in control of our circumstances
- God has a purpose in our trials – to make us like Christ and able to express His glory

What are some specific ways that trials make us more like Christ:

- Trials provide the opportunity to strengthen our faith (the eternal)
- Trials remove impurity in our lives (the temporal)
- Trials have the power to focus us on our great future hope

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

- God can use trials to show us our need of Him and His faithfulness
- God can use trials to display His deliverance in our lives.
- God can use sickness to display his healing
- God promises us He will answer us in the day of trouble

With that as a review, let's continue to look at this dynamic of trials in a believer's life.

READ Luke 8:11-15

11"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. 12"Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. 13"But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.

14"Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. 15"But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.

This is the explanation for the parable of the sower, or more correctly, the parable of the soils. This is a picture of four types of hearts who hear the word of God. Three soils fail to bring about a plant that matures and bears fruit, and one soil brings forth plants that mature and eventually produce fruit. How does the last plant differ from the first three?

First, all four soils come in contact with seed – all four hear the word of God. In fact, all four receive the word into their heart. The first seeds never sprout – they are stolen away before they germinate. This soil represents people who hear the word, and have no lasting interest, and therefore forget what they hear. The second hear and receive the word, and it even brings joy to their heart. But because their heart is hard, is rocky, the seed lays on the surface and never takes root in their life. There may be an outward appearance of life, but there is no real understanding. When difficulty and negative circumstances come along after a time, these people fall away, showing that they never had allowed the word to penetrate. The third type of hearer receives the word, and it even takes root. But this person's life is cluttered with other things. Things like cares, riches, pleasures of this life, and they never bring forth evidence of an abiding relationship with God. What life that seems to be there is choked out and dies. But the final type of person hears the word, receives the word, they keep the word, and continue in that word which eventually brings forth fruit.

What is the difference between the last planting and the first three? I submit to you that it is perseverance. The first three plantings did not persevere and mature to the place that they brought forth fruit. They didn't endure to the end. With that thought in mind, let's turn back to the book of James.

READ James 1:2-3

2My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

To produce fruit, we need to persevere. The book of Hebrews is an exhortation given to first century Jewish believers that were tempted to turn away from Christ because they were being persecuted. In these times of rejection and hardship, they were tempted to forsake their faith in Christ, and they needed to hold fast to their faith in Christ and persevere.

Listen to Hebrew 10:32-39:

32But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: ³³partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; ³⁴for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. ³⁵Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. ³⁶For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:³⁷"For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry."³⁸ Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him."³⁹But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

But perseverance isn't formed and developed in a vacuum. Trials are sent to us by God to produce a persevering faith that will carry us to the end. This perseverance is developed as we follow the example of our Savior. We need to fix our attention on Jesus and on our future hope and reward.

READ Hebrews 12:1-3

1Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

This passage in Hebrews shows us where to look for motivation and encouragement to persevere in times of trial. We need to look to Jesus as our example. What motivated Jesus to endure the agony and shame of the cross? It was the joy that was set before Him. Matthew Henry comments on what this joy is:

What it was that supported the human soul of Christ under these unparalleled sufferings; and that was *the joy that was set before him*. He had something in view under all his sufferings, which was pleasant to him; he rejoiced to see that by his sufferings he should make satisfaction to the injured justice of God and give security to his honour and government, that he should make peace between God and man, that he should seal the covenant of grace and be the Mediator of it, that he should open a way of salvation to the chief of sinners, and that he should effectually save all those whom the Father had given him, and himself be the first-born among many brethren. This was the joy that was set before him. The reward of his suffering: he *has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God*. Christ, as Mediator, is exalted to a station of the highest honour, of the greatest power and influence; he is at the right hand of the Father. Nothing passes between heaven and earth but by him; he does all that is done; *he ever lives to make intercession* for his people.

So in times of trial, we need to look to Jesus, and follow His example. He need to fix our hope on our eternal joy, our future reward of heaven, an eternal inheritance that is incorruptible and kept in heaven for us. If we are in Christ, and have truly received Him as our Savior and Lord, we have a glorious future inheritance. This is our true treasure, and this is where we need to set our affections and hope. As true believers face trials and tribulations, their affections and attention are more and more directed to the eternal, and away from the temporal. They learn to walk by faith, which is the substance things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen. Trials are the tool in the hand of our loving Father to teach us to walk by faith and place their hope in their future inheritance. This is the perseverance that is developed through trials.

Another reason we can rejoice when facing trials is that persevering in times of difficulty prove that our faith is genuine. What is built on the rock stands the test – what is built on the sand falls. Whatever is abiding in the vine perseveres and brings forth of fruit, and whatever is severed from the vine withers and is burned. Genuine faith becomes stronger and purified when subjected to fire, whereas impurities rise to the surface and are consumed.

James 1:3 says that trials are a testing of our faith. Trials reveal the true condition of our heart. Trials come in all forms. Some are small, others are seemingly overwhelming. Sometimes we face life and death situations, and at other times, minor irritations. Whatever form, trials serve as a test.

What is the purpose of a test? Tests are given to reveal the true condition of the thing being tested. Do you know how to spell chrysanthemum? All of us can say that we know how. We can even be convinced that we know the correct spelling. But the way to truly know is to write it out on a piece of paper and compare it with the correct spelling.

If you are out hiking, and thirsty, and come across a cool stream of water, you may be tempted to take a drink. But how can you know for sure that that water is fit to drink – that it is clean and pure. It may look good, and feel nice and cold, but in fact be contaminated. It needs to be tested.

Two of the four plants in the parable that we looked at earlier showed some indication of life, but in the end did not produce fruit. When did it become evident that they were not planted in good soil? It was when the time of testing came, the winds and the rains, that the lack of a root system was made evident.

Consider the story Jesus told at the conclusion of His most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. He talked about two houses. Above ground, they looked very similar. But below the surface, one rested upon the rock, and the other rested upon sand. When was it evident the true condition of each house? It was the storm.

How can we know that we have true faith in God? The book of James addresses that question head on. Does a person have true faith merely based on the confession of their lips? Certainly the Scriptures teach us that we need to confess Christ to be saved. But is merely what we say sufficient evidence that we have true faith? James asks that question, in verse 14 of chapter 2

14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

Jesus addresses that same question in Matthew 7: ²¹ *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*

It is clear from these verses that a mere profession of faith in the Lord is not sufficient evidence of true salvation. Genuine saving faith will produce more than just a profession. Just like good soil will produce good plants that will produce good fruit, and just like a good heart will produce good words, and just as a vine that is abiding in the branch will produce fruit, so genuine faith will endure in times of testing. It is because genuine faith rests totally upon the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Genuine faith realizes that apart from Christ, it can produce nothing. Genuine faith is a gift from God, and it trusts in God alone. Biblical faith does more than talk; it produces works of righteousness. The order is critical. Works of righteousness are the result of true faith. Works never save a person or justify a person before a holy God. But if true faith is present, it will produce a harvest of righteousness. Genuine faith perseveres and endures to the end.

So how can I know if I have genuine faith? What do I do in times difficulty and trial? Do I persevere, and grow stronger and closer to God? Do I draw near to Christ and as a result bring forth fruit? Do I come through trials and tests stronger, and purer, and more mature? Then that is evidence that I possess true faith. We can count it all joy when trials enter our lives, because as we stand strong in the test, it is proof that our faith is genuine. However, if difficulties and trials cause us to draw away from the Lord, and doubt His him, then we need to question if we have true faith, and ask Him to show us the true condition of our heart. Many people have been brought into a true relationship with Christ as a result of hardship and trial.

1. What are some practical ways we can focus on our future hope in times of trial?
2. Discuss the benefits of trials that you have seen in your life or other believers.