

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Life Application Sunday School Class

Book of James - Session 3

February 3, 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.

Phil 4:4 Rejoice always

I Thess 5:18 In everything give thanks;

I Peter 4:12-16 Rejoice in persecution and suffering

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

4. In the parable of the soils, there was one soil that produced a mature plant that produced fruit, and the other soils failed to do so. The difference between the last plant was that it endured, or persevered through the trials.

5. To produce fruit, we need to persevere, and trials are sent by God to produce a persevering faith that will carry us to the end.

6. Jesus provides the prime example of perseverance. He endured the agony of the

cross for the joy set before Him. We need to fix our hope on our eternal joy and inheritance in time of suffering and trial. This is walking by faith and not by sight, fixing our attention on the eternal, not the temporal.

7. Trials are a test to purify and prove the authenticity of our faith. As in the parable of the soils, the time of storm and draught revealed which plants were deeply rooted. Genuine faith will be purified and stand strong through the storm.

READ James 1:2-4

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

When we encounter a trial, we generally have an agenda. God also has an agenda. One objective in time of trial is to discern God's agenda and then replace our agenda with His. Many times we can hear our agenda in our prayers:

- Lord, take away this pain, I don't think I can take it anymore.
- Lord, save my husband. You know that I want to have a Christian marriage.
- Lord, please help my children to respect me and quit resisting my instructions.
- Lord, get my boss off my back. I want to be happy in my work.
- Lord, you know the money is tight. Please provide a pay raise so that I can pay my bills.

Is there anything wrong with these desires and prayers? I would answer with a qualified no. The Lord encourages us to call on Him and look to Him in times of difficulty and hardship for help and deliverance. Many times His purpose in a trial is to respond quickly to our cries of help, and bring Himself glory and us joy in the answer.

But how often have you cried out to God in times of difficulty and received no apparent answer. In fact, sometimes things get worse. You believe that God is faithful, and that we are supposed to ask and receive, and knock and the door will be opened, and that God has committed Himself to meeting our needs and blessing us as His children. When you don't receive relief, or deliverance, or healing, or a change in circumstances, perhaps you are tempted to question if God really loves you, if He really cares about you, or whether He really wants you to be blessed and have good things.

We need to understand God's agenda in our trials. This passage in James helps us to discern God's agenda. Look at the verse 4. *⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.* What is it that is God's purpose in the trying of our faith. God's agenda is to produce perseverance, and it is produced in our lives through the trying of our faith.

Hebrews 10:35-38 says it this way:

35 So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. 36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. 37 For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. 38 But my righteous one will live by faith.

This perseverance has a job. That job is to carry us to the completion of our redemption, which is the fullness in Christ. Many times our agenda is to have the difficulty, pain, or suffering removed from our lives. God's agenda in our trials is to produce perseverance that will carry us to the end.

READ Romans 8:16-27

16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

This passage contrasts our future hope and inheritance (the glory that shall be revealed in us), with our present sufferings. If we are in Christ, we are God's children and have a glorious future that is yet unseen. In fact, it is hidden. The whole creation is longing and anticipating the unveiling of our sonship. When Christ returns, our redemption will be completed as our bodies are changed into the likeness of His glorified body. God will unveil us before all creation as a finished masterpiece of His grace. Even creation itself will be liberated from the curse and enter into the freedom that we have as God's redeemed sons. This is the future aspect and culmination of our salvation.

Look at verses 24-25. *24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.* That word "patiently" is the same word translated perseverance. This patience, endurance, and perseverance is produced in us as our faith is tried. In this context of waiting for the day of our glorification, in our present state of weakness, verse 26 says that the Holy Spirit helps us. He knows our hearts, our desires, our motives, in other words He knows our agenda, and He also knows God's will – His agenda. As One who knows our hearts perfectly, He actually prays for us exactly in accordance with God's will – prayers that cannot even be expressed in words. Even when we don't know how to pray, He does.

This leads us to then next passage in James 1:5-8:

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. 6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

In time of trial and difficulty, we do need to pray. But we need to pray in accordance with God's will. So as we

seek the Lord during times of testing, we need to pray for wisdom, God's wisdom. Another way to say this is that we should pray for an understanding of God's agenda. Our primary need in times of trial and hardship is to have a revelation of God's perspective. And God promises in no uncertain terms, that if we ask Him for that understanding, He will grant it. He will freely give us all of the wisdom and understanding that we need to deal with the trial.

But there is a warning. We need to ask for wisdom in an attitude of trust and faith, without doubting. First, to ask for wisdom in faith means that we affirm that God is sovereign and that nothing happens outside His direct control. We recognize that our situation is no accident, or coincidence, or unfortunate mishap, but that it has come to us under the direction and control of a sovereign God. Second, to ask in faith means that we don't doubt God's wisdom, goodness, or His love for us. The word for doubt means to be undecided, or divided. It carries the idea of not being settled, not anchored, but unstable. When asking God for wisdom, we need to affirm our conviction that God loves us and our good in mind in the trial. Finally, to ask for wisdom in faith means that we ask with a commitment to accept and obey the wisdom that God gives us. This is the same as being a doer of the Word, and not a hearer only.

So let's summarize:

- When facing trials, we have an agenda that generally includes the removal of the hardship. Our agenda is expressed often in our prayers.
- Often God does respond to our prayers, and delivers us from our difficulty.
- There are other times that God has greater agenda in our trials, that of producing perseverance through the trying of our faith.
- We need perseverance to carry us through to the completion of our salvation, which is the glorification of our body and adoption as sons.
- In times of trials, we need to ask God for wisdom so that we can understand His agenda in the trial and act in accordance with His will.
- God has promised to give us wisdom, but we must ask in faith. To ask in faith means we affirm God's sovereignty, His goodness, and His love for us. We also ask with a commitment to obey what He shows us.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. What trials are you currently facing, and what have you prayed for? What is your agenda in the trial?
2. What are some ways we can strengthen our belief that God is sovereign, wise, and good?
3. How can we comfort and encourage others facing trials? How should we pray for others facing illness, wayward children, financial difficulties, family problems, terminal illness, and overwhelming circumstances?