Having Joy in Trials

James 1:2-4

Good morning! Today we are continuing our study of the Epistle of James by looking carefully at verses 2-4 of chapter 1. What we learned the last time we were together was that the author of this Epistle is most likely James the Just who was also the half-brother of Christ. He was writing this letter to Jews who has been scattered all over the world after the exile to Babylon and Assyria. These early believers in Christ needed encouragement to live out their faith during persecution and during the rule of the Roman Empire. Taking all of this into account James is now beginning the instructional part of the letter. Today we will be discussing a topic that man has been wrestling with since Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating from the Tree of Knowledge. What I am referring to is the problem of evil. Rather than look upon the existence of evil as a proof God not existing I will argue that the presence of evil proves that God does exist. We will revisit this near the end of the message. Let us first take a few moments to study what James says in verses 2-4 regarding trials.

**1:2 “Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials,”**

* In Greek trials is pronounced *peirasmos* and has a couple of different definitions:

1. A trial is a way to prove oneself as having virtue, integrity, or fidelity.

An example of this type of trial would be what God commanded Abraham to do to his son Isaac in Genesis 22:1-2. “Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the Land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.’”

In this verse we see that the text tells us this was a test or trial of Abraham’s faith in God. When God gave Abraham this command we are not told that this brought joy to him, rather it caused him great sadness. By passing the test Abraham proved that he was righteous because he did not withhold his only son from God and was willing to do what God had commanded.

1. The second definition of trials is temptation. When we speak of temptation there are many types we can discuss. There are temptations to sin that come from inside the heart. These temptations are not caused by something on the outside but originates in the fallen depraved heart of man. We must deal with these temptations because when man rebelled against God He became knowledgeable regarding what was good and evil. Ever since the fall man has chosen to rebel against God and if he left to go his own way will always choose what is evil and against the will of God.

Another source of sin are temptations that come from the outside. These are things that entice us to sin. This may be in the form of pictures, writings, or anything we take in that causes us to reject the will of God. These are also known as a trials according to Scripture.

1. The third definition of trial is “adversity, affliction, trouble: sent by God and serving to test or prove one's character, faith, holiness.” This tells us that some trials come from God because He is using that trial to help us grow in holiness or prepare us for a challenge He has for us to take on in this life.
2. No matter who we are, we will face trials in this life. This is something that is guaranteed. A question that I would like to ask for us to consider today is this: When someone becomes a Christian should we expect for trials to end? I know the answer to this question is probably obvious, but the answer is no. When someone becomes a Christian trials do not decrease rather we can expect that we will have to face them.

**1:3 “knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.”**

1. As James expounds on his teaching regarding trials he encourages his readers with the point that facing trials is good for them because it helps them to build endurance. “Philosophy may instruct men to be calm under their troubles; but Christianity teaches them to be joyful, because such exercises proceed from love and not fury in God. In them we are conformable to Christ our head, and they become marks of our adoption. By suffering in the ways of righteousness, we are serving the interests of our Lord's kingdom among men, and edifying the body of Christ; and our trials will brighten our graces now and our crown at last” (Matthew Henry). Suffering like Christ did helps us to identify with Him and it glorifies Him in the eyes of others.
2. Why does God allow His people to face such trials? God uses the harsh experiences that we face in this life to prepare us for the challenges we will face in the future as well as to prepare us for the glory we will enjoy with Him in heaven. We must remember that we face trials, but our trials are not worse, or more than our Savior faced in His life. “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let’s hold firmly to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things just as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let’s approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace for help at the time of our need” (Hebrews 4:14-16). The writer of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus Christ understands the afflictions we face here on earth because He faced those temptations and trials in His life, yet He was able to overcome them. Because He has overcome the world we can have peace and have the courage to face our own trials in His name (John 16:33).
3. The Apostle Paul echoes the words of James in his epistle to the Romans. “And not only this, but we also celebrate in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance;” (Rom. 5:3). And, in 2 Corinthians we read “For our momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:17). Both Apostles want their readers to know that the suffering the followers of Christ face on this earth has a purpose of helping believers to mature in the faith and it also is nothing when compared to the glory that God’s people will experience in eternity.

**1:4 “And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”**

1. “And that's the whole purpose of God is to bring you into a maturity. That we quit acting and responding like little children to the disappointments of life. That we quit throwing our little tantrums at God, stomping our foot and walking away and saying, I'm not going to talk to you anymore. But that we grow up and become mature” (Chuck Smith). When we have faced many trials and tribulations in this life we will grow a maturity and wisdom so that when the trials of life come we are able to handle them maturely and appropriately. In a way of speaking, God uses the trials we face to help us grow through adversity.
2. One example of how God used trials to mature His people was when He made the Israelites wander in the wilderness for 40 years after the refused to take the Promised Land due to their fear of the people in Canaan. During that forty years the people faced constant funerals watching a generation pass away from them. By facing that loss and having to rely on God to sustain them during that time He prepared them for the challenge of entering the land and conquering the people who were already there. God used that time of trial and challenge to prepare the people for the work they had to do.

What are we to do with the information James has presented to us in these verses? Let us discuss three applications to show us how this knowledge may be applied to our lives today. Firstly, we need to remember that being a follower of Christ does not protect us from having to experience tribulation, temptations, or trials. Even though we know that this life is challenging, we have a greater hope that overpowers all those trials. We are promised that the reward is great for those who trust in the Lord and seek to do His will in their lives. May we never lose sight of that blessed assurance!

Secondly, when we face the trials of life we do so because they help us to mature in the faith. God uses the trials in this world to prepare us for our eternal reward. The people of Israel had forty years of trials in the wilderness and Jesus Christ Himself faced trials of temptation and had to face His death alone with no one to be with Him. He faced this suffering because He knew that it would result in the salvation of millions who would put their trust in Him. So, when we face trials, let us do so with joy knowing that these are temporary and will seem like nothing compared to the reward waiting for us!

Finally, we have a Savior who identifies with us in those trials. He faced the same that we do and can understand how it feels. Unlike any other religion our God not only seeks our worship, but He has given Himself to make us holy and through His grace allows us to be in His presence because He wants us to be with Him to experience the perfect love and unity the trinity experienced before the creation of the world. We have done nothing to earn this, but our God has grace and gives us much more than we deserve.

***The Problem of Evil***

Since there is a good and holy God, why is there evil and suffering in the world today?

1. God created a world where mankind has free will.

* God loves His creation so much that He allows us the ability to make our choices freely, which is itself an act of love.

1. To love, man must be free to choose to love. If it is forced, then it cannot be love.

* Mankind is the only creature created by God who can love and to seek love from others. Love must be freely expressed, or it is not love. To make someone love you is not love but forced admiration. God has not forced us to love Him.

1. If man can choose to love, he can also choose not to love. This is the origin of evil.

* With the free will God has given man has chosen to rebel against what God’s plan for humanity was from the beginning. The good news of the gospel is that even though man has rebelled, God has reached out to humanity through His Son and has healed that broken relationship between God and man. Mankind has done nothing to deserve such grace, but God is loving and desires all to come to repentance and accept His Son Jesus Christ as their Savior. When man does so there is a restored relationship with God and man can be with God forever just like He originally intended that to be.

1. Therefore, God did not create evil or suffering. It is the result of man rebelling against God.

* Rather than blame evil on God, we must take that responsibility. The evil and suffering we see today shows us that when man attempts to remove God from his life the result is not good. Therefore, we must continually seek God’s will and follow His Word so that we can experience the best life possible on this earth.

***Conclusion***

In conclusion, today we have learned that when we face trials in this life we are experiencing an effect of the rebellion of man when he chose to disobey God. Trials are not meant to hurt us, but God uses them to help mature us in the faith and give us the ability to testify of our faith through those trials. Life in this fallen world is not perfect, but I have great news for all of you! When Christ returns we are told in the book of Revelation that He will take us away with Him and that there will never be any more crying, sadness, sickness, or evil. He will wipe every tear aware from our eyes and we will be in His presence for eternity experiencing the life God created for us to enjoy from the very beginning. Lord, thank you for that promise and help us endure these trials for now keeping that future hope always in our sights. Let us pray.