

January 28, 2018

"Consider it pure joy..."

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete lacking in nothing. 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. But when he asks he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed about by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does...Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."

James 1:2-12

The short letter from James has tended, over the years, to add to the seeming conflict between grace and works. Some Christian writers, including Martin Luther, thought the book should not be a part of the Scripture. It would seem to me however, that much of the controversy is created, not by the letter from James, but by our own tendency to misunderstand the place of works in our faith.

This letter is attributed to James, the brother of Jesus, and was written by someone with a long history in the ten-commandment Law of Moses. Its 102 verses contain 51 commandments or rules and because it is so clear about the differences between right and wrong, it makes most of us uncomfortable when we study it.

James begins his letter with this startling statement; ***"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds..."*** From the outset of his letter James challenges our most basic beliefs. You and I, like most of mankind, tend to react to trials with a great deal of grumbling and complaining. We don't want to experience trials and we certainly don't enjoy them when they come. We would rather not experience any trials if we could.

James challenges our basic belief that a joyous life should be a carefree life. Of course, most of us understand that life is seldom, if ever, carefree. All of us experience trials nearly every day. In commanding us to ***"Consider it pure joy..."***, and this is a commandment, James is telling us that the trials we experience are not the problem, but the way we interpret them is.

You see, we tend to see our trials as fundamentally unfair. We have health issues or financial issues or relationship issues and we complain, 'Why me?', and we often blame God for their existence. Let us be clear, if we are experiencing trials it is because God is allowing us to do so. That's right, God is allowing us to experience trials. But why?

In his perfect wisdom, God understands that untried faith will always be weak faith. If we suffered no trials we would have little need for God and, frankly, would seldom turn to him or depend on him. But in the face of trials how do we respond? We turn to God in prayer. We seek his intervention. We beg for his deliverance. Would we do any of these things if we experienced no trials? Be honest.

Trials, James would say, develop our capacity to stay the course; to finish the race; to persevere. One of the most telling measures of any believer's faith is their capacity to remain faithful even when their lives are being radically challenged. Trials help us to develop that kind of ***"...mature and complete..."*** faith.

Sometimes it is difficult to understand that the trials in our lives are designed by God to help our faith grow and develop and so James will command us to ask God for the wisdom to

understand his purposes. These words are not, as we usually apply them, a casual remark about general prayer inserted in this dissertation on trials. These words are a part of our maturing capacity to persevere. James would say, in the face of trial ask God for the wisdom to understand his purpose and the strength of faith to persevere.

When you and I struggle with trials we need to understand that they are really showing us that God is actively at work in our lives to strengthen our faith. He is teaching us to never give up.

**"Just keep
swimming,
just keep
swimming!"
She'd sing it all
day long!**

