

Message #2**James 1:2-4**

Several weeks ago we watched a true story of a realtor who turned out to be a serial killer. It took the police nearly 10 years, but they finally tracked him down. This killer was never on anyone's radar. He appeared to be a normal guy, working in a respectable career.

He went into a motorcycle shop and opened fire on four innocent people and killed them because he didn't think they were nice to him. Then he shot and killed a husband and wife and then he shot a husband and took the wife captive, but she eventually escaped and became a key reason why he was caught.

In in the span of 10 years, he had killed seven people. His mother was interviewed and she said, "My son is basically a good boy. Everyone likes him and he is not really a bad boy." Now we are watching this and saying that mother is completely delusional. That woman is whacko. She thinks he is a good boy and he is about as bad a monster as one can be.

The book of James is a book that begins in a really odd way. Now remember, James is writing to Jewish believers who are dispersed (**1:1**). They have been chased out of their homes and are being hunted, jailed and even killed.

I love what Kent Hughes said, these people are hurting and then they get this letter that is supposedly written to encourage them and the opening of the letter says, "be happy"; be joyful" "be glad" when you are facing these trials. It almost appears to be some challenge written by Pastor Whacko who begins in a way that sounds almost irrational and delusional (*James*, p. 18).

But James is anything but that. He is the real deal. **The book of James is a book that shows us how to reflect a grace life in a Pharisaical religious works world.** The book starts off by commanding a very odd thing. In fact, there are 54 imperative verbs in this book of James, which means James is presenting the idea that God is demanding we do this and it starts off in a very odd way. These opening verses presents grace truth that is so foreign to this world. His message is this:

BELIEVERS IN THE GRACE AGE ARE TO REJOICE IN ALL KINDS OF TRIALS THAT HIT THEM, KNOWING GOD HAS A PURPOSE FOR EVERY ONE OF THEM.

Notice the message James presents is to "my brethren." So this message is for brothers and sisters in Christ who have experienced the grace of God. If a person is not a believer, this message is not for them. If one is not a believer, there is no possible way they can have joy in trials and troubles because they are lost in them. In fact, their trials and troubles will often crush them.

James says you believers can have joy in trials knowing that God has a sovereign purpose for them in your life.

Now think of the options we have when we are hit with trials:

- 1) We can live in some state of denial;
- 2) We can constantly complain and whine;
- 3) We can have some self-pity party;
- 4) We can just talk to everyone about our problems;
- 5) We can view trials with joy, knowing God will use them to develop our character and we will get to see God work.

Trials come and we are to think about them and see the purpose in them. We are to take them “head on.”

Now there are some things we want to observe that make some sense of this.

First of all, the word “all” does not mean every specific thing. In fact, the word “all” functions as an adjective, modifying joy. What that means is you can find joy in all kinds of things when you know God has a purpose for them in your life.

I am certain the people in California who have lost their homes are not happy singing around a campfire. I am certain the people in states ripped apart by a hurricane are not having victory parties. This is not saying be happy about everything. In fact, the word “joy” is not the word “happy.”

What it means is when you are going through the character and quality of all kinds of different trials in life you can have a deep inner joy, knowing there is purpose in it. God has a purpose behind everything connected to His people. This is not some admonition to smile about everything that happens to you.

Now **verse 2** begins by saying “calculate or consider everything in your life to all be joy.” That word “consider” (ηγεομαι) is aorist middle imperative. What that means is we are to make pointed mental decisions in and of ourselves to consider everything in our life to be joyful in that we know God is with us. **So this is not so much about how we feel; but about how we think.**

The actual word “consider” means to lead, to guide, to be a ruler or commander. This has to do with taking charge as a commander or leader. **We have the responsibility to take charge of ourselves and our minds in times of trial.** James is commanding that we take charge of ourselves and count all things to be joy, in and of ourselves, when we are hit with various trials. We are to use our minds to develop a deep trust and confidence in God, knowing He has a sovereign purpose and plan.

Don’t count things to be punishment or calamity, but consider every kind of thing that happens to you to be part of a process that can lead to fullness in our relationship with God. The troubles and trials will become opportunities for us to see God work.

The Pharisees taught that trouble and calamity meant one was out of favor with God. They strutted around in all their success saying they were blessed of God and those Christians weren't. James said don't think like this.

Now this cannot possibly mean that these believers were to be happy about everything happening to them. This cannot possibly mean find happy pleasure in everything negative happening to you, including trials, temptations and suffering. Who in their right mind is happy about that? **The key to the joy is not the trial, but the “knowing” what God will do with us and for us in the trials.**

Now we are to think this way “when we fall into various trials.” We are not to go looking for trials, but we are to calculate this as joyful when we find ourselves in various trials and situations. The joy is not in the trouble or in the trial.

That word “various” means many colored things (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 370). In other words, this is not just one time of trial or type of trial, but various kinds. We will experience various trials in life. We don't look for trouble or trials and we don't anticipate them but they do come our way.

The word “trial” is one that especially refers to different types of afflictions and troubles and trials that hit us (*Ibid.*, p. 352). These are not things we brought on ourselves. Although, that can even be joyful if we handle it right. If we did something to bring the trouble on ourselves, we know how we got in it and we know how to get out of it and that can truly strengthen us.

This is not a challenge to consider it joy when trouble hits someone else. We are to do it when trouble hits us. It is easy to tell others to rejoice when trouble hits them, but it is not easy when it hits us.

To have this attitude about us, is a development into the highest level of grace. This kind of joy is not just happy-clappy emotion. It is a joy that only God can give in the midst of what we are experiencing. Circumstances cannot take it away and neither can this world.

Now if James is going to challenge God's people to have joy in the midst of trials, which almost seems absurd, there had better be some good reasons for it. James gives three rational reasons:

REASON #1 – You can know that this tests your faith. **1:3a**

Years ago someone said, “A Christian is like a teabag; he's not worth much until he's been through some hot water.” God has a purpose for the pressures we face and troubles we experience. **The purpose is the development of our faith. Trials in our lives become the means of faith testing and faith building.**

Any person who has ever been tested in any way can truly relate to this. When you have been tested, if you pass the test, there is relief and happiness. No matter what the exam, when it is over and you know you have passed, there is a sense of elation and relief.

In any test of a believer's life, the end result can be a strengthening of faith. When your faith is tested and you stay faithful, your faith is strengthened.

When we are hit with trouble the tendency can be to become so discouraged and despondent and depressed. What we should realize is "I am about to learn that I can trust God and He will get me out of this one way or another." We should think, "I am about to see God work and my faith will be strengthened."

God allows various things to come into our lives to test our faith. That word "test" is one that means this is the process God uses to subjectively analyze our faith with the goal of proving our faith is a worthy faith (*Ibid.*, p. 119). God actually shows us that our faith is solid and provable by tests and trials.

There is no joy in the trials. There is no joy in saying praise the Lord when you are on an expressway with a flat tire. There is no joy when you look at your house just destroyed by a hurricane. There is no joy when you go to a funeral of a family member or friend. There is no joy when you are told you have cancer.

The joy is found in knowing that when we go through things such as these our faith in God is not shaken, but strengthened. We will have the privilege of seeing God do some wonderful things. Great strength and honor comes to one whose faith has been tested and proved.

If you have ever seen a blacksmith work, it is impressive. What you learn by watching them is that fiery pressure of a hot furnace ends up producing the toughest steel. That tremendous heat ends up producing steel that is the best and the strongest.

If you are a believer you will be tested. No one will be exempt. When we find ourselves in the midst of the trouble and pressure, consider it joy, knowing that it will make our faith strong. There are different ways we can look at tests and handle them: 1) Depression; 2) Joy; 3) Complaining; 4) Whining; 5) Praying; 6) Trusting.

When David was going through horrible troubles he wrote these words: "I will bless the LORD at all times" (Ps. 34:1). He wrote that in a context of people trying to kill him.

REASON #2 – You can know that a tested faith produces endurance. **1:3b**

Grace Christianity was under attack. The religious world was promoting religious works and for one to stay steady in their faith was an amazing development of faith and endurance.

Having patience or endurance is a key virtue in the mind of God. Staying power is no light matter when it comes to our relationship to God. The world does not view it that way, but this is the way God views it. Patient endurance is viewed by this world as letting people walk all over you. But in God's world, this is a spiritual virtue.

God uses pressure and trials to produce that in us. Frankly, trials make us more dependable as believers. Trials give us stability.

We could call this “patient endurance.” Now having endurance in faith is a critical matter in this Age of Grace. Various tests continually are used by God to develop our character, specifically a patient endurance.

It is interesting to me that the actual verb from which the noun endurance comes is a word that means to “stay behind, remain behind or leave behind” (*Ibid.*, p. 462). When we experience negative things, the thing that can come out from behind them is a development of our patient endurance.

When we see a loved one die, we remain behind and we patiently endure and wait for the Lord to one day take us. Patient fortitude is developed by trials.

The Apostle Paul often used the metaphor of an athlete to describe the Christian life. One thing about all winning athletes is that they have enduring patience. They have to endure all kinds of things to become a winner. They don’t get into award-winning shape all at once. It takes time. They have to keep training even when it is tough. They have to keep competing even when it appears they are losing. In the end, that is what makes them winners.

The same is true for us.

REASON #3 – You can know that endurance in our faith produces wonderful results. **1:4**

The endurance that is being produced by trials is to have a positive effect on us. We are to “let endurance” progress forward in its continuation. This is important to see. **This testing of faith is not given by God to see if we have faith; it is given by God to strengthen and develop the faith we already have.** James says there are three results produced by a faith developed by trials:

(Result #1) - Endurance is God’s way to make us perfect. **1:4a**

The actual word “perfect” is used twice in this verse. It is a word that actually means to come to the finished end or to reach the finished level of complete maturity (*Ibid.*, p. 442). What I understand this to mean is that God uses trials and pressures to cause us to grow up to full maturity. Our faith will have “tenacity” to it.

This is not referring to sinless perfectionism. It is saying that enduring faith develops us into a mature and complete solid faith that will take us all the way to the end. Troubles and trials cause us to be fully developed as believers.

H. A. Ironside said, “As we grow in this grace of patience until there is no longer any rebellion against the will of God a strong Christian character is developed. We become mature and whole, no longer craving for what God sees fit to withhold. This is real victory” (*James*, p. 13).

(Result #2) - Endurance is God's way to make us complete. **1:4b**

This word complete has a different slant to it. It means to let the endurance develop in its entirety in regard to all that has fallen to us (*Ibid.*, p. 315). God allows different trials to come into our world to develop an enduring faith, so we are responsible to let it happen. Whatever hits, we are to stay faithful and see it through to the end. We are to grow up to maturity.

One commentator pointed out that the words "perfect" and "complete" are eschatological. This development of our faith is designed to develop us into an end product when Christ returns. Dr. C. I. Scofield said, "It is important to note God does test and prove His own for the purpose of conforming them to Himself (Rom. 8:28-29), but He does not entice or tempt to evil (James 1:13-14).

God permits us to go through some trials to develop our character to make it an award-winning character. In that we can find joy.

(Result #3) - Endurance is God's way to cause us to lack nothing. **1:4c**

Now once this has happened, we lack nothing in our faith. A tested faith lacks nothing because it has been tested. When our faith has been tested and is proved that it can be trusted, we lack nothing in our relationship with God in this Grace Age.

Persevering faith is a very highly prized kind of faith to have. Trials produce that highly prized faith.

So if we know that, there is some joy we may have when we are going through the trials.

When we go through difficulties, we can be a passive participant, or we can be a positive enthusiast.

The only way we can do that is by realizing God has purpose for this. **Trials are the tests that lead to perseverance and maturity. That is where the joy is found.**

Now don't overlook the fact that what is tested is the faith, not works. In grace, faith is the issue.

Sometimes you will hear someone say, "Why would God let this happen to me?" Well here is what we know—to develop your faith. There is the answer, pure and simple.

PARTING THOUGHTS:

- 1) Believers will have trials. No believer will be immune to this.**
- 2) Trials are temporary. God has a time limit for them.**
- 3) There is a purpose for every trial and pressure God permits to come into our lives and that purpose is a steadfast faith development.**