

# The Happiest Person in the World

*Epistle of James*

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We come to our second message in this epistle as we learned last week of the half-brother of our Lord, James the half-brother of Jesus, the same mother. Jude also, another author of Scripture, a half-brother. He, in fact, introduces his epistle, "Jude, the slave of Jesus Christ and the brother of James." Neither one of them claimed to be the brother of Jesus because they are only half-brothers and he is their Lord and their King. But as we saw last time, he is the half-brother of Jesus.

I chose this epistle because it is so practical. There is a sense in which James in every chapter in every verse is saying, "Be consistent. Live out your faith. The things that you say you believe, live as though you truly believe them." We see today that the first section of James, verses 2 to 4, we're going to be looking at this morning, he's asking us to live out our faith, to be consistent. If what we believe is true, then it ought to impact our attitude and the way that we live and for the title of the message, I've chosen the title "The Happiest Person in the World." The happiest person in the world and I'm going to submit to you that James is saying that the Christian who sees things as they truly are, not as they appear to be but as they truly are, is the happiest person in the world and that the Christian ought to be the happiest person in the world.

I chose that particular phrasing because of Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a wonderful preacher, the 20<sup>th</sup> century preached in London from 1939 to 1969 at Westminster Chapel, a wonderful expositor of the word of God. He wrote as so many Christian pastors and ministers today. He was a medical doctor, unsaved, did not know the Lord but was advancing in his work and was on track possibly to become the doctor, the personal physician to the King of England, so excellent was Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his medical practice. And then one day he encountered the Lord Jesus Christ through the preaching, sharing of the Gospel. He came to Christ and then shortly after decided that he would give his life to the cure of the soul, not the cure of the body, and so he became a pastor. But he is actually a physical doctor and then also a spiritual doctor. But what he said about his conversion was he found himself, when he came to understand the Gospel, that what he deserved was the wrath of God, that he was a sinner separated from God and what Jesus Christ had done for him in coming, bearing his sins, paying the full debt of his sins, rising from the dead and offering him salvation simply by faith alone in Christ, he

said, "I felt as if I were the happiest man in the world and my desire was that other people might know my happiness."

That's what Christians ought to be. Now, we struggle, don't we? We don't live a lot of days like we're the happiest person in the world. It may have been a long time since you felt like the happiest person in the world. I know, myself. It's amazing how down you can be, discouraged you can be, but James is calling us today to see that if we were seeing things as they truly are and if we will discipline ourselves to see things as they truly are, we can have that happiness. God wills that we have that kind of joy, not a kind of superficial, syrupy pretend happiness. No, not a happiness that ignores the sufferings that are real in this world. No, not a happiness that so many in the name of Christ today are confused about, those who proclaim a health and wealth and prosperity Gospel that God wants you to be happy and whatever you want, just name it and God is going to give it to you. No, that's not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches something much more wonderful than that. That's like cotton candy or drinking from a mud puddle compared to what the Bible is talking about. Cotton candy is a little better than drinking from a mud puddle. I choose that.

The happiness that God is talking about is rooted in reality, the joy that we're called to. We're going to see we're called to have all joy. It is rooted in the reality that God is for you if you're in Christ. He's not for you to give you whatever you want, he's going to give you whatever he wants which is what you really truly, if you had any sense, if you and I had any sense, it's what we would want and once we have it, we know, "Yes, this is what I wanted." It's not health and wealth. It's something much more wonderful than that. It's spiritual health, spiritual riches, not the passing, transient things of this world.

This is what James is talking about and James with his characteristic straightforward speech begins his letter dealing with this issue. We'll begin reading at verse 1 and we'll read through verse 4.

1 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. 2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we say just as we heard sung a moment ago, we join our hearts with that prayer, "Speak, O Lord." May you open your word by your Spirit and speak to our hearts, drive out the darkness of unbelief, the darkness of doubt; change us for your glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

James says, "Consider it all joy, my brethren." That's the imperative in this passage. There are actually two imperatives: "let endurance have its perfect result" in verse 4, but "consider it all joy" is the main controlling imperative in this section verses 2 to 4.

Consider it all joy. Be joyful. Be happy. This is what a Christian should be. If you think about it, it's really obvious that it should be this way. I mean, what is the fruit of the Spirit? The fruit of the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you and you're walking in the Spirit, what will you manifest? Love. Joy. Peace. Love, joy. And if you simply see things as they are, you cannot help but have unshakable joy.

Now, we're going to consider this teaching under three headings. We're going to look first at, our first point is an unhappy circumstance. An unhappy circumstance. When you encounter various trials, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials." I want to look at that phrase "when you encounter various trials," that clause. When you encounter various trials. This is not the recipe that you and I would put together for happiness. When I wake up in the morning, this is not what I put on my Daytimer, I don't have a Daytimer anymore but on my plan, "I want to encounter various trials today." In fact, when you encounter various trials, that is an unhappy circumstance, in fact, the words help to bring it out. The word "trials," I'm reading from the New American Standard Bible, the word "trials" comes from...it's translated, actually it's the key word in the first 18 verses of this chapter. This Greek word for "trials" is there in verse 2. Look down at verse 12, "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial." It occurs four times in verse 13 but there it is translated "tempt." The same Greek word. "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone." Verse 14, "But each one is tempted." So seven times in the first 14 verses this word occurs, five times translated "tempt" which is the negative side of the word. The word has a range of meaning and from God's standpoint, it's the positive that he's doing for the Christian, but Satan tries to take the suffering that happens that God is using for our good and turn it for our destruction. He tries to make that trial into a temptation to depart from the Lord but the word "trial" itself is a neutral word. The word that is translated "trials" and "tempt" is, itself, a neutral word and context tells you whether it's more negative or more positive at the moment. The word literally means, the verb that's the root of this word, this noun here, means "to try; to attempt; to make a trial of; to test; to prove; to strengthen through testing."

So when you encounter various trials, when you encounter things that are hard, that are testings and it can be temptations, when you encounter a bunch of them, he says that is when you need to be joyful. But when we encounter trials, that's not when we tend to be joyful and trials can look a lot of different ways. Physical suffering is a trial. Emotional suffering, trial. Temptations are trials and James is saying, "You're going to encounter, when you encounter various trials, you're going to experience this unhappy circumstance, that's the moment to be joyful."

Now, there are a couple of things we're going to see about this. First of all, when you look at the phrase when he says, "when you encounter various trials," trials are inevitable. Under this first point, unhappy circumstance: trials are inevitable. It's not if you encounter various trials but when you encounter various trials. Jesus said in John 16:33, "In this world you shall have tribulation but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. But in the world you're going to have tribulation." Job said, "A man is born to suffering, to trials, to difficulties, as sparks fly upward." Basically if sparks go upward, you know

that's what a man is born to, suffering, difficulty. This world is filled with suffering because of what sin has done to this world. The passage Jess read earlier speaking of the sufferings of this present world, this present world is wracked with suffering so to live in this present world is to suffer. So trials are inevitable.

Look at the next key word, the word "encounter," when you encounter various trials. The first thing, they are surprising. You know, you don't get a note a couple of days ahead of time before something bad happens. Things just happen and that's the sense of this word. The word "encounter," the King James, I like the way it translates it, "fall into." When you fall into various trials. Actually, the Greek word literally means "to fall around." So the word means to fall. It means you're not planning to fall, when you fall, you fall. It happens suddenly, unexpectedly.

So trials, these tests, these trials come at you unexpectedly. They are inevitable. They are often unexpected. And they can be overwhelming. In fact, the word when he says this he uses this word "encounter," it's actually a very rich word. I said it means "fall around." It's a word that's used in a couple of other places in the New Testament, one is in Luke 10:30 when Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan. Remember he talks about a man that's going up from Jerusalem to Samaria and the man falls in among thieves. "Falls in" is the same verb here. He's walking along, he doesn't know what happens and suddenly he finds himself surrounded and that's really what this word means. To fall around, it has the word "fall" with the preposition "peri." We get our word "perimeter" from it. Around.

To fall around, the idea is you're surrounded by trials. Suddenly you're surrounded by trials. The sense of overwhelming anguish that comes on you when you realize trial and trial. Isn't it amazing how trials come in bunches? I remember hearing that years ago, you know, from grandparents or older folks saying, you know, things come in threes. Has anybody ever heard that one? They usually talk about deaths coming in threes and stuff. You know, somebody you love, and somebody else, and somebody else. You know, I don't think there's a hard and fast rule. I'm not saying that's true but it does seem that sometimes the Lord sends trials in bunches. He doesn't say limit it to three here. You're surrounded by trials.

So trials are inevitable, they are unexpected, they are overwhelming and they are many colored. Fourth little sub point here under unhappy circumstance. The word "various" literally means "variegated, many colored." Trials come in all different shades. If you think about the box of, I forgot how many crayons is in that giant box of crayons, you know? Like 150 or something? 168. Probably some multiple of 4. Anyway, so say there are 168 of them and you're looking at these, "Wow, what's that? That looks like orange to me." No, that's not orange, it's between orange and whatever else and there are like 17 things between orange and red. All different shades. This is the word he's using here. Trials come in all different colors and shades.

So he pictures being surrounded. When you find yourself surrounded by trials of all sorts, now what is your natural reaction? "Oh, no." It's to grumble and complain. Our flesh responds that way. James says you're going to find yourself in the unhappy circumstance,

this is the way the Christian life is. From time to time, you're going to find yourself surrounded by multi-colored trials and you're going to find that just in general your life is going to be filled with them but you're going to find times where they're just surrounding you and what are you going to do? He says you should be joyful. We're like, "Wait a minute. I don't understand that."

You know, it's interesting he's saying this to, we talked about this last time, the audience that he's writing to he tells us in verse 1, "the 12 tribes who are dispersed abroad." When you look at what happened in the early church, we saw last time that James became, though he was the brother of Jesus, he was the unbelieving brother of Jesus, he did not accept Jesus as Messiah. John 7:5 says his brothers did not believe in him. But we saw in 1 Corinthians 15:7 that the Lord Jesus made a resurrection appearance to his unbelieving brother and his unbelieving brother repented of his unbelief and bowed the knee to his half-brother as his Lord and Savior and immediately the grace of God was upon him and he became the leader of the church in Jerusalem and an apostle, according to Galatians 1:19, and of course, he wrote the book that we have here.

He was a leader in the church in Jerusalem but the church in Jerusalem was going through some wonderful times initially, remember 3,000 people saved at Pentecost. The Lord keeps adding to their number as you read through chapter 4 and chapter 5 and chapter 6 and then in chapter 7 of Acts, Stephen gives his great defense of the faith and then he is stoned and we're told in chapter 8, verses 2 to 4, that a persecution breaks out of the Jews in Jerusalem and this same word that James uses here in verse 1, "who are dispersed abroad," comes from the verb that's used twice in Acts 8:2 and 8:4 when it says that the Jews, the believing Jews in Jerusalem were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. It says it twice. They were scattered. Then in chapter 11, verse 19, he goes back and he says, "Remember the believers that were dispersed," and he uses the exact same word here throughout. They also went, they didn't stop just in Samaria and Judea, they went to Cyprus, they went to Antioch in Syria. They were scattered throughout.

James is writing to them with a pastor's heart. He had been the leader of that church in Jerusalem, people that were under his ministry now spread out and he knows that they're in trouble. I mean, they ran for their lives. They're discouraged and so he writes this epistle to encourage them. It's a general epistle written to just all of them wherever they are but he knows the people that he's writing to are already in this unhappy circumstance, doesn't he? They had to leave their homes. Imagine that. Persecution forced you to leave your home and you just go off and you get in your car, of course they didn't have a car, you get in your wagon and you drive, you ride your donkey, whatever. You go to a town far enough away that the persecution is stopped and there you are and you try to make a life. The wonderful thing is the Lord was sovereign over this, he is sovereign over everything. He was doing this to get the Gospel out and people started getting saved in Antioch and Cyprus and everywhere the believers went. But still, it didn't mean their life was easy.

They're suffering. They're going through difficulties. They're trying to make their lives work in a world that's hostile to them. Remember, they have it doubly bad. To be a Jew in

the first century was to be maligned by most people just because you were Jewish. Antisemitism was alive and well in the first century. We read several different times, a couple of times in the first century, the Jews were expelled from Rome. We're told in Acts 18:1, I believe it is, he says that the Jews were forced out of Rome by Claudius. The Emperor got upset with the Jews. There was some stuff going on and he said, "Get out, all of you!" And then years pass and then he finally lets them back in. Can you imagine that, what that's like?

Well, so now the Christian Jews are hated because they're Jews but they're also hated by the Jews because they're Christians. So they know what it is to have unhappy circumstances and then they have to live in a world where loved ones die, illnesses come, difficulty upon difficulty and James says, "I know what you're going to go through. I know what you are going through because I know the ways of God and you if you could see not what you see with your physical eyes but if you could see with your spiritual eyes, the reality of what's happening, you should be incredibly joyful."

That brings us to our second point. It's not just an unhappy circumstance, that was our first point, now second point: an unexpected command. An unexpected command. The command is, "Consider it all joy." Consider it, that's the imperative and what are you to consider? This suffering, these trials, you're to consider it all joy; that is, whole and complete joy; that is, unmixed joy. That's not like you're supposed to just consider, "Hey, things are really bad but I'm going to put a happy face on it and hope for the best." He says, "If you're thinking rightly, you will look at it as completely joyful." Now, we're hurting, we're suffering but he's saying our attitude of our hearts needs to be confidence in the goodness of God and if we really saw what he's doing, we would be joyful.

I think it's hard for us to relate to this but maybe an illustration would help. We had some renovation in our house. We had a problem with our shower. We had some mold in the shower, leak in the tile, and so that led us a while back to start renovating our bathroom. Well, we decided let's go ahead and do the floors in the bathroom too. Well, if we're doing the floors in the bathroom, let's do the floors in the bedroom. So it got to be a bigger project than we thought and we had some difficulties but along the way, one of the first things you have to do to renovate that is you have to tear it out. You start tearing stuff out. In a way, that's kind of fun but really it's not because, to me, I can always mess something up. You know, like tearing out too much. So, anyway, but if you think about it, though, from my wife's standpoint, she loves things beautifully ordered, she likes...I like it too but I don't care as much about it obviously as she does, at least she would tell you that based on the way that I keep things when she's not around.

But to get from point A to point B, we went through a lot of ugliness. Tearing stuff out. Exposing where the floorboard had some mold and was actually, you could just step into the decking and it just pushed down like a sponge. So we had to tear all that out and if you look at this, this count it all joy. Look how beautiful your house is. What? Even when they start putting it back together, this isn't what we want to live in. I mean, you've got drywall dust and stuff. You've got tile. You've got all the mess of it. Well, along the way,

it's messy but if you have in view what it's going to be at the end, you ought to have joy and when you get to the end and you see it, "Yes! This is why we went through that."

This is the basis of our joy in Christ. You see, we're all renovation projects and for God to work in what he wants to work into your life, he's got to tear out. He's got to pull things apart and the way that he does that in his perfect wisdom is through suffering. And the wonderful thing about the Lord is he never pulls out more than he needs to. Every movement, every stroke is exactly the perfect thing. James says when you begin to understand this, you count it all joy. If you saw what's really happening, it is not just joy, it's all joy.

I love this word "consider it." A couple of the translations, King James and ESV say "count it all joy." This verb, the imperative, consider it all joy, count it all joy, literally means "to lead." It's not a word you would normally expect to see. Consider or think. It's a word, it's used this way but not as much in the New Testament as other words. It means "to lead; to be a leader; to go before; to lead the way." That's the verb that's behind this particular word here in English. Metaphorically, though, it was used as "to lead the mind; to think; to consider." These are legitimate interpretations of it, of the metaphorical extension of that literal root idea of "lead; go before."

And I really love that because I think what he's saying is what you need to do when various trials come in, the command is, get out in front and lead your mind. Don't follow your mind. Don't lead from behind. Lead from the front because what happens when bad things happen, what does your mind do? Your mind is always working and even as believers, though we have been given the mind of Christ by the Spirit, we still have a fallen nature, we have a fallen mind, a darkened mind, and our sin nature draws conclusions, the wrong conclusions. It doubts God's goodness. It looks at bad things happening and says, "The Lord doesn't love me. Look at this upon this upon this, proof upon proof upon proof he doesn't love me." Satan is deceiving us, trying to deceive us.

Lloyd-Jones again. I love what he says in his book "Spiritual Depression." He says, "Our problem is that we listen to ourselves when we should be talking to ourselves." He's getting to the same point here. Our problem is that when something happens, we just let our minds go and we listen to the thoughts that come out of our minds rather than speaking the truth of Scripture, rather than getting out in front of our mind and saying, "This is the way we're going." We need to speak to ourselves, to speak truth to ourselves. This is what James is saying. Consider it, get out in front of your thinking. When all these trials are piling up and surrounding you, get out in front of your thinking and lead the way and determine, "This is good and I'm going to be joyful in God and in Christ because of the promises of his word."

Now, there are some things that he tells us to help us lead our minds in this way. There are four sub points. The command is consider it all joy and I think he gives us four reasons, four sub points under this second main point, unexpected command. Four reasons we should see trials in this way, all joy.

The first is trials are essential. The first sub point: trials are essential. Faith must grow. God intends your faith if you believe in Jesus Christ, you are a child of God, he intends for your faith to grow. It's not to stay static. Faith must grow and the way that it grows is by being tried. So if your faith has got to grow, it must be tried. So if God has called you as a believer to follow Jesus and he says you must grow in faith, then when trials come, good news, you have an opportunity to grow. This is necessary for me to grow. In fact, I could not grow without this. Trials are essential.

Secondly, trials are productive. He says, "knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance." The word "produces" is the key word here. As your faith is tried and tested, it produces. Literally the word is "works." It's a strong word for "works." It works endurance. It's working. It's a process. The trying of your faith is working on your faith and it's producing endurance. The NIV says "perseverance." The King James says "patience." I like the ESV, "steadfastness." And the idea is that your faith is getting stronger through the enduring process, through the process of being tested.

An illustration of this would be like muscles. I mean, you look at somebody that's been working out or working a job that causes them to get stronger. One of the young kids in high school age, I happened to go behind him and pat him on the back and I said, "Wow, what have you been doing?" You just kind of hit on his shoulder, couldn't see it from the outside of his shirt but when I felt it, like, "Whoa." Well, it turns out he'd been working at a golf course every week for hours doing all kinds of stuff and you could tell. It didn't happen accidentally. Muscles don't develop without labor. You have to try them. In fact, to really develop muscles, you have to break them down. It's got to be hard on them. That's a picture of our spiritual faith. Our faith has to be tried. It has to be, in a sense, broken down a little bit so that holding on, enduring in it, it is built up and strengthened.

So what are you to do? Well, you're to endure. The testing of your faith produces endurance and what that means is basically you just keep believing. When things around you are falling apart, you keep trusting in Christ, that he is working in your life, that he's going to be sufficient to you that in your weakness, he's strong. You keep looking at Jesus, trusting in Jesus, and what happens is you are being made stronger just in that. Don't try to run away from God when you're suffering. Don't try to get off the anvil when he's working on you but surrender to him, trust in him, and keep trusting and that faith is getting stronger. Trials are productive.

Trials are essential. Trials are productive. Trials are effectual, third sub point. Trials are effectual. Look what he says. The process works. "And let endurance have its perfect result." The testing of your faith is going to produce endurance and endurance is going to have its perfect result where perfect result has the idea of full effect. The NIV says "finished work." That if you keep trusting in the trials, God is faithful and it's going to have its desired effect. The Lord doesn't start projects like we do. You ever start something and then you leave it undone, maybe you're like me, I'm reading several books at a time and then I'll find one I haven't been looking at for four or five months and I say, "Oh, that was the book I was reading. Where was I?" You pick it up. Nothing really wrong with that but it's worse when you start a project and you leave it undone. God



doesn't do that. Now it takes him time to get his project done, he does it in his time, but he never stops working on what he's doing. He never forgets. And trials are effectual. They really accomplish the purpose for which he sent them.

Endurance will have its perfect result. It pictures a process here. The word "perfect result" there means "the completion; to come to completion." The work is going to continue until it is completed, "so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." The last sub point here: an unexpected command, count it all joy because trials are essential, trials are productive, trials are effectual and trials are profitable and I would add, wonderfully profitable. The threefold description of what happens to you as a result of going through the trials: so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

He describes how wonderful the trial; the outcome of the trial is with three different descriptive terms. First of all: perfect, the same word he used earlier in the verse. Perfect result. Perfect. It means "to come to the end." To come exactly to what God wanted. It's like an artist painting a picture. He has in mind what he wants to paint and when he gets that last brushstroke, it is finished and no more need to mess with it anymore. It's there. God is working in his people that kind, with that kind of focus and he says perfect and complete. The idea is wholeness, exactly what he wants to be there. You have everything. And then, thirdly, negatively, he says the same thing. Perfect means to come to completion, complete means to come to completion, and lacking in nothing means to come to completion. Three ways he says the same thing. Whenever the Bible says something three times, it's taking it to the superlative degree.

James is saying, "Listen, you think that the trials are coming to mess you up and to hurt you and to diminish you, but what they're going to do is they're going to fill you up and to bring you to the place that you really want to be and they're going to take you to that place of perfection, completion and you'll be lacking in nothing. Nothing left out. You will have everything." The picture is that the Lord, he's wanting to take us through our lives from blessing to greater blessing.

You see this in Abraham's life. You see this throughout the Scriptures. This is the way God works with his redeemed. In fact, turn over to Romans 4 and let's look at this. Abraham was a man who knew what it was to encounter incredible trials and one of the great trials of his faith was when the Lord told him that he was going to have a son in his old age. Remember God told him, "I'm going to make you a great nation." He was already 75, his wife was 65. They had had no children. He says, "I'm going to make you a great nation." At 75 he tells him that and at 99 the Lord finally gets around to telling him, "Next year you're going to have a child." Twenty-four years he waited. And when the Lord tells him that, in hope against hope he believed. The Lord let him get to a place, I mean, think about it: did God just forget what he was doing? The Lord says, "Hey, I'm making a nation of Abraham. Okay, Abraham, I'm going to make you a great nation. I'm over here doing some other stuff. My goodness, it's 24...he's 99, Abraham, I'm back." No. The Lord was testing his faith. He let him wait 24 more years so it was clear there is no way humanly this can happen. You're going to have to put all your trust in me.

As we read this, verse 18, it talks about...well, first of all, verse 17, Abraham "(as it is written, 'A father of many nations have I made you') in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist." This is what Abraham knew about the Lord: he gives life to the dead and he calls into being that which does not exist so if he says I'm going to have a child, I'm going to have a child.

Verse 18, "In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, 'So Shall your descendants be.' Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body," he had the promise of God, he looked at his body, he looked at appearances, "his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and he considered the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but," look at that next phrase, "but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God." He looked at the outward circumstances and he concluded, "Yeah, there's no reason for me to have any hope physically but I have the promise of God and I will believe." And so he persevered in faith. He kept trusting and he grew strong, and because he was fully assured and he received what he longed for.

Now, if you ask him at 101 when he was holding his newborn baby on his lap, "Would you rather the Lord had given it to you at 76?" If you asked him at 75, he would have said, "Yeah, I'd like it at 76." But if you ask him at 101, what would he say? "No. I grew so much through the time of testing."

Then the Lord tests his faith again when Isaac is 10 or 11 years old, 12 maybe. The Lord tells him to go and sacrifice Isaac as an offering, remember? God is trying his faith, testing his faith. The author of Hebrews tells us that Abraham, he knew God's promise. God had told him and God who does not lie, who calls into being that which does not exist, who can raise the dead, God said, "Through Isaac your descendants will be named and you're telling me now to kill Isaac." The author of Hebrews says, "He believed that God was able to raise him from the dead." "If you're telling me to kill him but you've already told me he's going to be the one through whom the nations are going to come, then I will do what you're telling me to do because I believe that you will raise him from the dead." And it says, remember that the Lord stops him from killing him, of course. "No, I just wanted to see if you truly believed. I wanted to test your faith." And the author of Hebrews says that Abraham received Isaac back. Think about it: he has laid him on the altar, the agony of walking up the hill with his son when his son says, "Dad, I've got the wood. We have the knife. We've got the fire. But where's the lamb?" Abraham said, "The Lord will provide, my son." They walk up. He ties him to the place of offering. He's ready to, lifts his hand to bring the knife down and God says, "No, Abraham. Do not harm your son." And remember the language in Genesis 22? I encourage you to go back and read it, what the Lord said to Abraham when he told him to go to the land of Moriah. He said, "Take your son, your only son whom you love, and go and offer him on the mountain that I will show you."

Now, God is a God who is good and kind and loving. Why did he say to Abraham, "Take your son, your only son whom you love"? Isn't that turning the knife, so to speak? "Take your son, your only son whom you love and go and offer him." And after he starts to offer him and he says, "No, stop." He says, "Now I know that since you've not withheld your only son whom you love," he uses that same language again. Then he sees that the Lord has caused a ram to be caught in the thicket and he says, "The Lord has provided," and so he offers that ram in its place, in Isaac's place. That's the offering and he sees God in a whole new way and he says, "You are Yahweh, Jehovah Jireh. The Lord will provide. You are an amazing God," and we find out later that Mount Moriah is the place Jerusalem. It's either the Temple Mount or it is Calvary. It's one of the two. Before Jerusalem ever existed in its present form, just the little town of Salem nearby, God sent him to that mountain to offer his son, his only son whom he loves, and then the Lord said, "No, here's a ram. You don't need to offer your son, your only son whom you love but there will one day come a time when I will offer my Son, my only Son whom I love and I will not pull back the knife. I will put him on the cross." And it says because he trusted the Lord, he received Isaac back as a type. Somehow that agony of soul, that moment of testing, came to him a moment where his eyes were opened to see 2,000 years ahead something of the cross that, "God, you're going to send your Son." Ask Abraham after that, "Was that worth it? Do you count it all joy now, Abraham?" "Absolutely."

James is saying we need to count it all joy because that's the way our God operates. In fact, the third point: an undeniable conclusion. We considered an unhappy circumstance, an unexpected command, an undeniable conclusion. This is the undeniable conclusion that's behind James's command here. His theology that he's presenting to us is simply this: if you are in Christ, God is always at every moment working for your good. No matter what it appears to be, what is happening is actually the very best thing that could happen for you and if that's the case, you should count it all joy. I mean, it's like he just wants to bless us. That's exactly what Jess read earlier, Romans 8:32. If God did not spare his own Son but delivered him up for us all, if God didn't say, "No, I'm not going to give my Son like I didn't make Abraham." No, but he gave his Son. If he gave that which is most precious to him, how will he not together with Christ freely give us all things? If he gave, the argument is from the greater to the lesser, if he didn't withhold his Son, he will not withhold any good thing from you in him.

This means everything, every moment, every day is good. It's blessing. It's kindness. This is actually what I think is behind the passage in 1 Corinthians 2:6-9, one of my favorite verses, "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for those who love Him." We often think of that about heaven and I think it does apply to heaven, but I think it also applies to what is happening in your life today. It applies to what is happening to your life when you find yourself surrounded by various trials. When you fall into a place of various trials, eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered into your heart what God is preparing for you even now. The reason I say that is you look at the context, he's saying the wisdom of God is so great that when he delivered up Jesus to the cross, the rulers of this age, that is Pilate, Herod, also the spiritual rulers of the age, Satan and his minions, they thought they were winning. They thought this was the greatest moment for evil ever. Those who

looked at the cross, John, Peter, the ladies there, they thought it was the greatest defeat. It looked like the most horrible, horrific event that had ever happened and in some ways it was, and yet it was also in reality the most glorious. The most wonderful expression of love the world has ever seen. Mind-blowing love revealed at Calvary. Mind-blowing victory at Calvary. The whole universe saved at the moment of defeat.

That's the wisdom of God so when you find yourself surrounded by various temptations, things are falling apart in your life, if you know Jesus Christ, this is going to come around at some point to that kind of victory and in heaven, we're going to be celebrating all of the ways that God did this in our lives. We're going to see so much more clearly. It was all perfect. It was all wonderful. The times that I doubted him the most were the times he was doing the most beautiful and wonderful things.

Patti has a nephew, Craig, who has a son named Cade and I was talking to him some years ago. Cade is now 10 or 11. This is actually Vicky C.'s grandson. He's one of these little boys that just, I mean, he is always happy, especially when he was like 5 or 6 or 7 years old. So I was talking to Craig one day and I said, "You know, man, he just seems like, I never see him when he's not smiling." And he said, "Yeah, it's crazy." You know how different children. "My daughter, she's happy enough but she's not like Cade." Cade, like, wakes up in the morning and it's like, "What have you got for me?" It'll be, you know, "Hey, we're going to the park. We're going to play outside." "Alright!" It's going to be, "Hey, we're going to be working all day in the back yard raking leaves." "Alright, I can't wait! Whatever it is, just bring it, I'm ready. This will be the best thing!"

Now, the reality is as we think about that, we think things like, "Isn't youthful innocence beautiful?" He's going to find out as he grows older things aren't like that every day, but listen, if we really believe our theology, the kind of joy that that little boy had that is probably going to diminish in this natural understanding over time like everybody else, for the Christian the joy should get better and better every day. Every time we go through suffering and we come out the other side, we should be saying, "What have you got for me today? Lord, I know you love me. What have you got for me today? I can't wait to find out how you're going to use this for my good." We face the realities, sin is ugly, death is real, pain is real, but yet if you're in Christ he's making you more and more like Jesus every day. He is accomplishing his perfect plan.

James says if you know that, you can count it all joy. Get out in front of your thinking and don't listen to yourself. Speak to yourself and believe the truth. This is true. If he did not spare his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how will he not together with him freely give us all things? What a glorious God and doesn't that make you want to just confess how often we doubt him? How often I grumble? How often I look at things through jaded eyes? His promises are true. They are yes and amen. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. He's withholding no good thing from those who love him. If you being evil, Jesus said, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more does your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him?

Let's pray together.

*Father, we thank you that your plan is always the wisest, the best. Forgive us, Lord, for the unbelief that still crops up in our hearts, forgive us for the joylessness, the times that we are discouraged. We know, Lord, that we can't just walk around being Pollyanna. We don't want that. We know that pain is real but yet in the moments when we really are suffering, there can be a deep and abiding confidence that good things are coming. Even as tears flow down our cheeks, even as our hearts break and we acknowledge the reality of these things, Lord, let there be a confidence, a believing trust in you, and help us reach out and place our hand in the nail-pierced hand of our High Priest, our sympathetic High Priest who meets us at our point of need. And Lord, help us to grow in faith and to grow mighty in faith and to give you the glory and honor that is your due. May we be increasingly joyful people and may our joy draw others that are in darkness to the light. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*